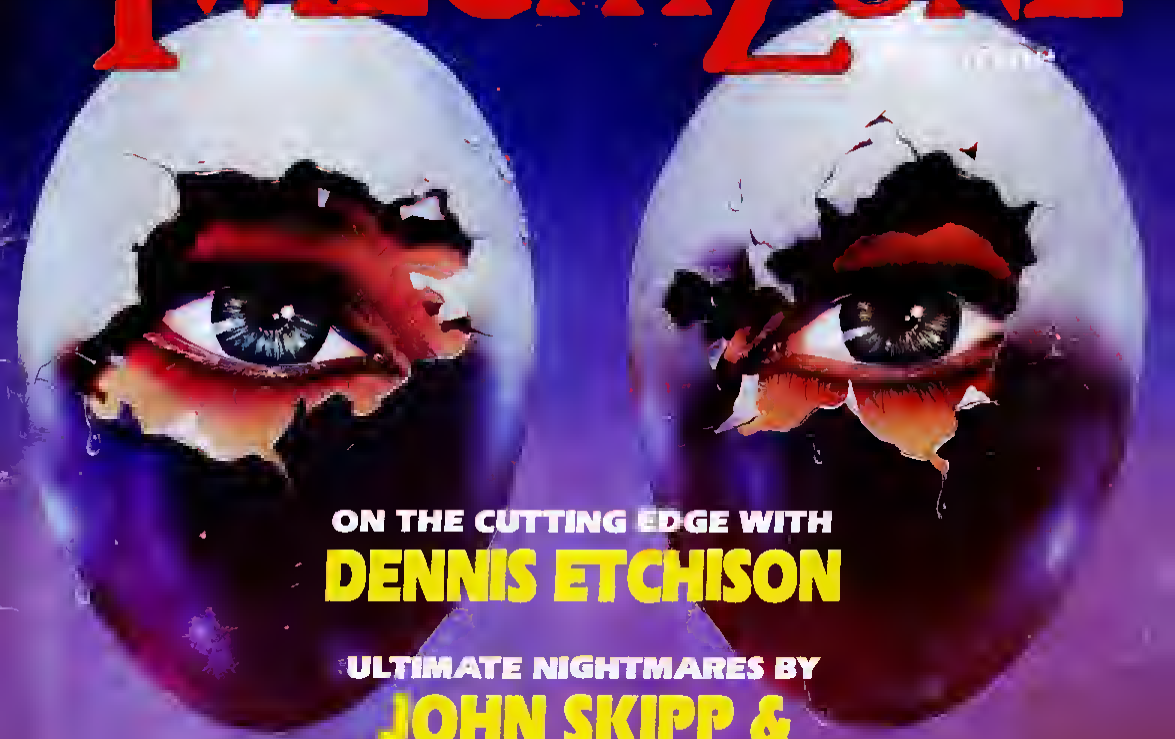
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February 1988



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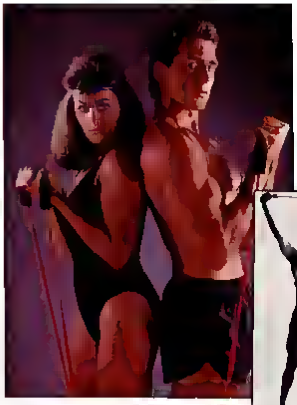
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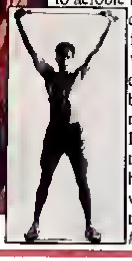
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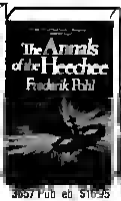
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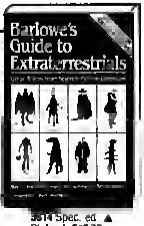
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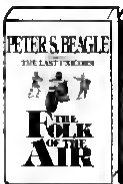
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Rod Serling's THE TWILIGHT ZONE Magazine

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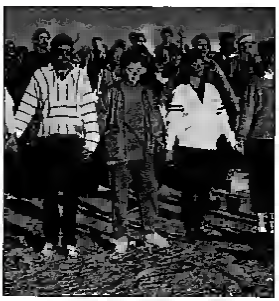
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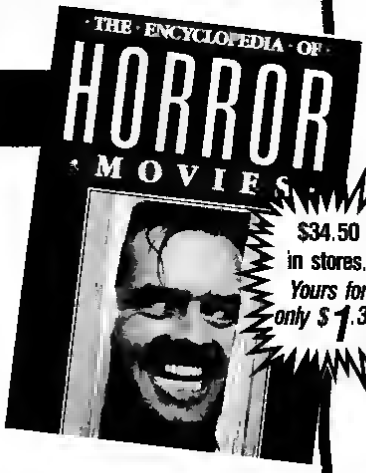
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In The Twilight Zone



Craig Spector & John Skipp



Kim Antieau



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Elizabeth Hand

IT'S ONLY A DOZEN YEARS TO THE THIRD Millenium.

The New Year just ahead, and beyond it the fast slide to the end of the century, makes this a fitting time to contemplate humanity's chances of making it to the year 2000 alive and well. **John Skipp** and **Craig Spector**, usually known for hard-edged urban horror, have stared that particular nightmare straight in the eyes in a new novelette, "Not with a Whimper." Their third novel, *The Scream*, should be just off press from Bantam as you read this.

The approach of the new century also prompted us to take a closer look at the popular new social movement known as the 'New Age." Our guide through the land of channeling and crystal consciousness is **Mark Arnold** (a charter member of TZ's "Border Patrol" of scouts at the fringes of culture) who's previously reported such phenomena as the "Fostoria Miracle," *feng shui*, and the imminent return of the serpent-god Quetzlcoatl. Arnold and co-editor Terry Windling created both the World Fantasy Award-winning *Elsewhere* anthologies and the futuristic-punk-elf-shared-universe *Borderland* for Ace books. Arnold's novella "Pilgrims to the Cathedral of Sleaze' will appear in David J. Schow's forthcoming horror anthology, *Silver Scream* (Tor Books).

Another report from the borderland comes from **Roger Anker**, who talked with second-generation fantasist **Richard Christian Matheson** about his experiences as a "ghostbuster" at UCLA's Parapsychology Laboratory. Matheson's been busy of late. With Thomas Szollosi, his co-author on the recent comedy film *3 O'Clock High*, he's formed his own independent production company, and is currently involved in projects with Steven Spielberg, Ron Howard, Tobe Hooper, Dustin Hoffman, and his father, Richard Matheson. He's also sold a sitcom to ABC, and stories to *Omni* and *Silver Scream*. His story "Break-Up" is from his new collection, *Scars and Other Distinguishing Marks* (Scream/Press and Tor Books).

As counterpoint, **Stanley Wiater** provides a fascinating conversation with author/editor **Dennis Etchison**, a self-described "Romantic Realist" who's won high praise for the sort of real-world terror evident in his story "Call 666," in this issue. Etchison's new collection *Red Dreams* is just out from Berkley Books.

And, for some historical perspective on that fine line between inspiration and madness, we offer "The Book of Hieronymus Bosch," a poem by *Twilight Zone*'s founding editor **T.E.D. Klein**. For those of you who've been impatient for new fiction from Ted, you'll be pleased to know he's nearing completion of a new novel for Viking Press.

Also included in our bumper crop of fiction this issue are two powerful new stories with Latin American settings, **Paul Witcover**'s "Moonlight Becomes Magenta" and **Kim Antieau**'s "Listening for the General," and two tales suitable for reading on a cold winter's night—**Randolph Cirilos** "Snowcrest" and Peter Heyrman's "The Immersion."

Finally, we're delighted to present our first two **TZ Firsts**, new stories by previously unpublished writers. One is **Elizabeth Hand**'s "Prince of Flowers," a haunting tale of Malaysian magic. "I came of age during the first punk explosion,' writes Hand, "moved to Washington D.C. to study playwriting at Catholic University, and spent seven years as an archivist on the videodisc project of the National Air and Space Museum while earning a degree in cultural anthropology. Last year, I quit to write full-time. I'm married and live on Capitol Hill: no children, no cats, no dogs named after French structuralists."

Although he's never published fiction professionally, **J. Noyes Scher**, author of our second TZ First, is already developing a reputation as a talented filmmaker. An animated video inspired by the music of Xavier Cugat airs frequently on HBO, and Scher has written a number of screenplays. "The fantastic element in my work comes out the interaction between the world of the unconscious and the world of the real," says Scher. ■

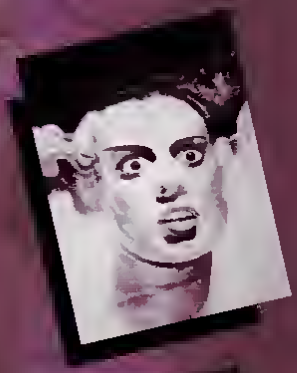
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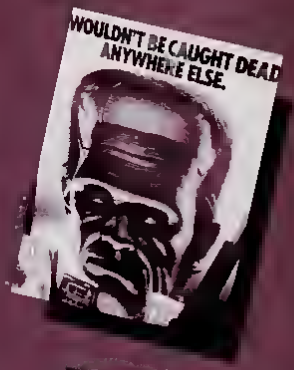
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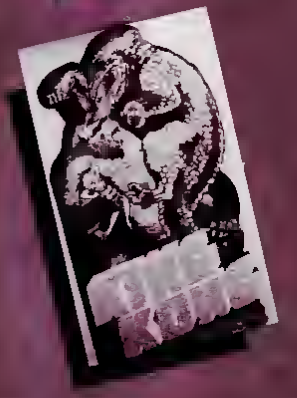














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LETTERS

RABID FIRE

THE THEORIES PRESENTED BY ROBERT Simpson in the December 1987 issue about the possible existence of vampires and werewolves were very interesting. But one theory that makes an equal amount of sense was omitted.



While porphyria and schizophrenia offer suitable explanations for the rise of such legends, another disease might also bring this about. That disease is rabies.

Consider the symptoms of rabies: drooling, inability to drink water or eat food, savagery, and the desire to attack others.

In addition, a person afflicted with rabies might seek the dark, avoiding daylight, coming out only at night. Such a person might be seen as animal-like, possibly even evil.

Most important of all, a rabid person would be able to infect another person with a bite. The principal horror of a vampire or werewolf is its ability to bring about the same condition in an innocent person.

In a time when rabies meant inevitable, horrible death, it was dreaded much as we fear AIDS today. A rabid person would be feared, hated and avoided whenever possible. Such is the stuff legends are made of.

Porphyria is an extremely rare disease. It is much more likely that our ancestors had actual experience with rabies than with porphyria. Rabies seems to be a more believable source of these legends.

LINDA SICKLER
Du Quoin, Illinois

AW, WISE GUY, EH?

WHILE PLAYING A ROLE-PLAYING GAME WITH several friends a few weeks ago, the topic of the Three Stooges came up. My friend Ryan said: "You know, when I was a kid, I could never understand why when Moe hit Curly with a hammer, it would just wrinkle up and make a 'doink' noise, and Curly would slap his forehead, and life would go on."

And I said: "Well, how long do you think the Three Stooges would have lasted if every time Moe hit Curly with a hammer, he'd fall down, his body shaking with convulsions, with blood streaming from his ears?" There was no answer, and the game continued as usual.

You might be asking yourselves now: "Well, what does that have to do with TZ?" Here's my idea. Although I like it when the hammer falls and the ears bleed (Clive Barker's "Down, Satan!" for instance), and I like the "doink" (Stephen King's "Paranoid: A Chant") and the middle ground (like Lucius Shepard's "Delta Sly Honey"), I've noticed an inequality among the ranks. So, in a dragged-out sort of way, I'm saying that you should vary the mixture. Balance it so you don't run it rich in one aspect all the time.

P.S.: I'm looking forward to the first "TZ First."

STEVE KECK
Yucaipa, California

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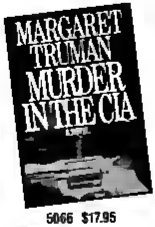


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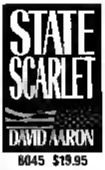
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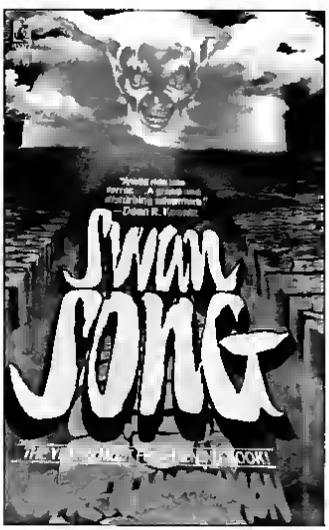
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Masques II edited by J.N. Williamson

LET'S TALK ABOUT THAT STAPLE OF COMMERcial publishing, the Big Book. The designation doesn't refer only to novels the publisher thinks will sell zillions of copies; it also denotes the size. The summertime Big Book for beach reading has to bulk sufficient not only to entertain whole sunsplashed days on the beach at Oahu, but as well to serve as an emergency float should the unwary reader get sucked out to sea by a riptide. The winter Big Book isn't just for those wallflower days in the Aspen ski lodges; it's also for providing endless tinder in setting one's tires afire for survival after the Volvo slides off a high mountain pass.

Contemporary sf and fantasy have lots of Big Books: witness King's *IT*, *Maia* by Richard Adams, David Brin's *The Uplift War*, Barker's *Weaveworld*, *The Awakeners* by Sheri Tepper, Stephen Donaldson's *Mirror of Her Dreams*. Although bigness is sometimes cited as a negative criticism, it isn't necessarily a synonym for badness. It's just that gigantism in novels often leads to sloppy craft. Both writers and editors seem to have a hard time keeping track of all those damned words.

Heart and Moxie

Robert R. McCammon has written a very large book. It's called *Swan Song* (Pocket, 956 pp., $4.95, ISBN 0-671-62413-X) and it's by the author of six previous novels including *Mystery Walk*, *Usher's Passing*, and *They Thirst*.



McCammon also wrote the splendid story "Nightcrawlers," a haunted Viet vet chiller that became one of the new *Twilight Zone*'s most successful episodes.

McCammon's had an identity problem. He's been obliged to cope, to a certain degree, with standing in Stephen King's shadow. This has not been wholly deserved, of course, though it must be noted that a novel such as McCammon's *They Thirst*, while a delight in itself, can easily be read as *Salem's Lot* redressed for southern California. The hardbacks *Mystery Walk* and *Usher's Passing* seemed to be attempts to break away from this perception. Now there's *Swan Song* which some inattentive readers have dismissed as a knockoff clone of *The Stand*.

It isn't. The superficial similarities are there: each novel decimated northern forests in order to be printed, each uses a post-apocalyptic American landscape (King borrowed a plague, McCammon, a nuclear holocaust) as a canvas, both use that backdrop as the arena for a massive confrontation between good and evil.

But there are differences. McCammon has a feel for and an apparent love of physical landscapes that King doesn't use nearly so effectively in *The Stand*. It may well be that Southern writers (as McCammon is) have a love of the land that cannot be matched by Yankees. At any rate, McCammon's physical settings possess a welcome gritty feel.

The author has swabbed *Swan Song* with an additional mystical coating that *The Stand* lacks. In spite of this, the conclusion feels brought about much more by the endurance and resourcefulness of the human characters than happens in *The Stand*. Unlike the climax of the latter, there is much less the impression of a lightning-fingered intercession from the Big G.

This is not to say either book is the better. Both are great hulking entertainments with occasional insights, endless incident, and stereotypical but still empathetic characters. Each is highlighted by a terrific antagonist, but while King's Flagg is an unrelentingly dark figure, McCammon's Friend is a wonderfully twisted creation, a sort of demented Peewee Herman.

While McCammon's prose, as one might expect in a thousand-page book, occasionally flabs out, he still frequently hits on all cylinders. There's a wonderful scene early on when Air Force One, carrying the President and fleeing the nuclear holocaust, is downed by an airborne Greyhound bus. The latter, trailing black smoke from its burning tires and spewing bloody bodies from shattered windows, has been hurled aloft by the firestorms. Something like that, I had to contemplate for a minute or two before grinning and turning the

page. There's enough other off-base stuff in the contents to make you quite aware that Robert McCammon is not just a drudge churning out dish-water page-turners. Believe me, you could take far worse to the beach or ski lodge. Along with melodrama, the book's got heart and moxie. All the right stuff.

Space Cowboys

This issue, I want to recommend three strong books by Texans (well, one's originally a Mississippian, but not so's you'd notice). Texans do love to brag up the resources of their overly spacious state, but when it comes to writers, they have a right. Just in fantasy and sf alone, there's Bruce Sterling, Ardath Mayhar, Lewis Shiner, Steve Gould, Chad Oliver, Warren Norwood, Justin Leiber, Vicky Ann Heydron, and a raft of others.

Take Neil Barrett, for example. He's been a solid professional writer for a good many years now, cranking out novels under various names (including his own) in a variety of categories. He's steady. He's low-profile. He's commercial.

He's underestimated.

In the last decade he published a half dozen entertaining novels with DAW, none of which, other than *The Karma Corps*, made much of a splash. Four were a tetralogy about a piggy hero (literally) in the far future. The publishers managed not to have all the previous volumes in print when the climactic book came out. Bad planning.

Lately Barrett's been publishing a series of powerfully sophisticated, thoroughly strange stories in *Isaac Asimovs SF Magazine*. Now his novel ***Through Darkest America*** has been published under the "Isaac Asimov Presents" banner by Congdon & Weed (275 pp., $15.95, ISBN 0-86553-184-6). What with the stories and the novel, it's like the author is starting a brand new career. And if he doesn't suddenly attract a raft of sales, awards, and adulations now, well, there's no hope for either readers or Barrett.

Through Darkest America is a work of astonishing power, a hard-edged, uncompromising portrait of survival and triumph in a post-Apocalyptic America, a powerful and compassionate portrayal of a boy's coming-of-age in a merciless future world.

Okay, so much for the blurbs. I *mean* everything I'm saying above, but it doesn't really get at how I feel about the novel. *Through Darkest America* simply is one of the best books I've read this year. It's well-written, finely crafted, and it entertains. So what's it all about?

Some of you may remember Leigh Brackett's minor classic of the 'fifties, *The Long Tomorrow*. In Brackett's novel of a post-nuclear holocaust America, a young boy came of age while seeking out the last bastion of scientific knowledge in a technophobic world. Neil Barrett takes some of the same feeling, then jacks it up with added megawatts of story-telling power.

In Barrett's book, young Howie Ryder is set adrift by direst circumstances in the late twenty-first century when America is still recovering from World War III. Howie's is a rural world of hardship, isolated from the distant federal government and the rumored western rebellion. First, Howie loses his little sister to a suspicious best-and-brightest government recruitment program that takes young people off to a Big Rock Candy Mountain training camp in Florida. Then a sort of spiritual descendant of Quantrill's Raiders slaughters his parents. Howie wreaks a



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Books

terrible vengeance on their commander and has to flee on a picaresque path across the South and Southwest.

Although horses are making a comeback by the time of the story, most wildlife—and especially food animals—are quite scarce. It seems that America is using human beings as a meat source—well, not *human beings* exactly. Farmers raise "stock" or "meat" that look identical to homo sapiens, but apparently have no more intelligence than a sheep. A nicely developed set of social conventions have evolved so that most citizens of the future simply do not and cannot perceive the stock as any variety of *people*. If it's meat, it's gotta be a beast and therefore nonhuman. Barrett is as matter-of-fact about this aspect of his extrapolated society as he is any other factor. Even red-meat carnivores among his readers may find themselves a touch queasy.

Not entirely cognizant that the man he mutilated is hellbent on catching up with him, Howie wanders the West. The landscape at first resembles a variant of post-Civil War America. It gets progressively stranger as Howie encounters a variety of distinctive characters, participates in a huge trail drive, and starts learning about betrayal, love, loyalty, honor, and violence. He meets the duplicitous Pardo and the latter's two kinky brothers, Klu and Jigger. He falls hopelessly in love with Kari Ann, the young master gunsmith, who turns out to be not exactly the girl of his dreams. Finally he has to confront Colonel Jacob, the carved, blinded, and castrated killer of Howie's parents—



who intends to pay back his injuries with compound interest.

What are the book's strengths? First, there's the sense of place. Barrett plats out his landscapes as grittily as any you'll find in a dozen westerns. In *Through Darkest America*, you never escape the taste of dust.

But that brings up a legitimate question. Is the novel just a futuristic version of a very standard oater? Absolutely not. I sat back in admiration at the author's mastery of structure. However low-key in its extrapolation, *Through Darkest America* is a genuinely speculative sf novel that wouldn't have worked—or at least couldn't have functioned nearly so well—had it been set in bloody Kansas after Appomattox.

What else? The novel is told in a thoroughly distinctive voice. The dialogue is as colorful as it has to be, and crackles like a flash-fire on a prairie. The characters sound exactly like who they are. And who they are, whether in a primary or a supporting role, are fleshed-out people. Nobody's a complete villain or an utter hero in Neil Barrett's Twenty-first century America. Not even Howie. Some of the characters are on the psycho fringe, but Barrett understands full well that villains are the heroes of the Other Side. The bad guys have their own reasons for doing what they do. Just like in real life.

And maybe that's the summary. The heart of *Through Darkest America*—and it is an ultimately compassionate heart—is Howie Ryder's transit from child to adult. It is a test of fire and blood. The coming-of-age plot is one of the oldest chestnuts in western literature. But this one works. I could believe Howie and what happened to catalyze him into adulthood. I winced when he got hurt. I was convinced when the changes in him were evident. My throat clutched up when he negotiated his last bitter-sweet encounter with Kari Ann and then discovered his final shattering truth in the desert.

In other words, *Through Darkest America* affected me just like a good novel is supposed to do. I'm impressed when that happens. What's more, the book clearly sets the stage for a sequel. I will welcome it.

And I say that about damned few novels.

The Texas Influx continues with Howard Waldrop's ***All About Strange Monsters of the Recent Past*** (Ursus Imprints, 5539 Jackson, Kansas City, MO 64130, 126 pp., $35.00 plus postage, ISBN 0-942681-00-2) *$35.00??!!* Hey, that could get you a year's membership in Amnesty International, or feed a



foster child in New Jersey or Wisconsin for a year.

Or it could help keep Little Howard Waldrop from going to bed hungry. *All About Strange Monsters of the Recent Past* is subtitled "neat stories by Howard Waldrop." It is an absolute gem of a book. The price is high because this title exists solely as a specially assembled, signed and boxed edition. It was created this way not to serve the avaricious motives of a let's-gouge-the-collectors small-press publisher, but rather because the creators (Arnie Fenner and Jim Loehr) wanted to publish a collection of never-before-collected Waldrops and they wished to Do the Job Right.

Aside from being printed on the sort of paper that will outlive tax liabilities, the book has a beauty that starts with a fine Don Ivan Punchatz jacket painting and continues through four black-and-white interior illustrations and four tipped-in color plates by eight artists ranging from Tim Kirk and Hank Jankus to Robert Haas and Thomas Blackshear. There is a hilarious introduction by Gardner Dozois and a perceptive afterword by Lewis Shiner.

Of course the important stuff is the stories. There are seven here, including one never before published anywhere. Lew Shiner points out that Waldrop stories are always labeled by their author long before being actually written. Included are the fifties monster-movie story of the title, the E.M. Forster story ("Helpless, Helpless"), the Hemingway story ("Fair Game"), the time-travel Bosch story ("What Makes Hieronymus Run?"), the alternate-Africa story ("The Lions are Asleep This Night"), the doo-wop story ("Flying Saurer Rock and Roll"), and the Egyptian story ("He-We-Await"). The last is

the new piece, a story heavily front-loaded with nifty Egyptological info (Howard does love his research), but which starts moving along handily once human characters enter the scene. It's about a modern boy created by gene-splicing genetic material from a long-dead pharaoh.

I think my favorite, though, is "The Lions Are Asleep This Night," a subtle and affecting story of a young boy's growing up in an Africa rather different from the continent we recognize in our own reality track. Cultural chauvinism and shoddy history courses as they are, many readers have apparently not even comprehended the science fiction elements in the story.

Chances are that *All About Strange Monsters of the Recent Past* will never see paperback, at least not in its present form. What's likelier, if there's any justice and common sense out there, is that some enterprising publisher will put together a combined reprint volume including these stories and those from last year's Doubleday collection, *Howard Who?* Maybe call it *Howard Waldrop—That's Who*. In the meantime, collect the hardbacks as best you can. You run little risk of disappointment. In truth, nobody else writes like Howard Waldrop.

And now for something completely different. I've mentioned Joe R. Lansdale in these pages before; he of *The Magic Wagon* and *Dead in the West*, as well as the editor of *Best of the West*. Joe's from Nacogdoches—that's East Texas—and I could listen to his accent for hours. It could be a toss-up, but actually I'd rather read his books. There's a new one out called ***The Nightrunners*** (Dark Harvest, Box 941, Arlington Heights, IL 60006, $18.96, 214 pp., ISBN 0-913165-17-4). There's also a boxed, signed, limited edition for a cool $34.95.

The Nightrunners is a horror novel, though only marginally a supernatural one. It's about bad kids gone worse, and certainly argues persuasively for retroactive birth control. The story revolves around a wimpy intellectual who takes his wife into the piney woods for recuperation after she's raped and nearly killed by a gang of intensely nasty teens. What the couple doesn't know is that the kids are coming after them to finish up the job right. What results then makes *Straw Dogs* seem a model of liberal restraint.

Things get complicated as Lansdale swings us back through time to meet the original gang leader, the vilest of pathological killers, who gets caught and kills himself in jail. No problem for society, except that the dead punk seems to be possessing the mind and body of his former gang lieutenant. That's when we meet the God of the Razor, one of the least forgiving (and most irritable) deities of the modern era.

The body count's high here. But then so is the energy level, and that's what carries the book. I suspect *The Nightrunners* represents earlier Lansdale. It's full of enthusiasm and raw power, with a whole raft of fictive experiments that don't always work. This seems clearly a novel in which the author was having one hell of a good time and trying to top himself on every page.

Just like the sawed-off which is an important prop for the story, the novel's scatter-gun approach sometimes hits the target. Often it doesn't. But it always hits *something*.

I wouldn't be surprised if it ends up as a movie. Probably not a John Hughes production. More likely a low-budget special with a cast of unknowns and a freshman director. Rated a hard R. But well worth one dark night's outing.

This Ain't No Disco

If you pay any attention at all to what New York publishers are flogging, you have probably noted copious ads and posters for the Bantam New Fiction line. This series of brand-new contemporary novels in classy trade-paper format at first appeared to be a nifty and *hot* cutting-edge project intended to discover and print all the best new incarnations of Jay McInerny and Bret Easton Ellis. Well, perhaps it's not turning out quite like that. The first two selections, *Somewhere Off the Coast of Maine* by Ann Hood and *White Palace* by Glenn Savan are reasonable enough stories, if not blockbusting innovations in modern literature. But with the third selection, prospects for excitement are dimming. As one Big Apple editor in a position to know said, the Bantam New Fiction line is turning into a series of *now* romances for the sort of yuppies who generally read *Cosmo*. That doesn't exactly encourage me to keep a standing order. And yet... There are at least two jokers shuffled into the deck. Both are gutsy, sharp-edged novels of—uh, is the glossy, upscale audience

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BOOKS

ready for this?—science fiction. One atypical entry is Lewis Shiner's *Deserted Cities of the Heart*, presumably scheduled for sometime in 1988. The other is Lucius Shepard's ***Life During Wartime*** (Bantam New Fiction, 448 pp., $8.95, ISBN 0-553-34381-5), just now on the bookstore shelves.

Shepard is probably the most visible of the writers coming to prominence in the past five years. His stories seem to appear everywhere; they're always interesting, if not uniformly successful; and a number of the best were collected earlier this year in *The Jaguar Hunter* (Arkham House). *Life During Wartime* is Shepard's second novel, the first being *Green Eyes* (Ace, 1984).

Both novels share an odd similarity in structure. Each seems to start out being one thing, then convulses in midbook and becomes another. *Life During Wartime* out-complicates *Green Eyes*, however, by additionally taking on the burden of incorporating material previously published as pieces of short fiction. Alas, the seams sometimes show. Most of the readers in the field are familiar with such stories as "R&R" and "Fire Zone Emerald," Shepard's tales of a Vietnamized Latin America in the coming Central American war. *Life During Wartime* takes those stories, transmogrifies some more than others, adds new material, and hopes it'll all make sense as a continuous novel.

The results are mixed as the reader follows the convoluted life of David Mingolla, American artillery grunt, as he meets and loses the enigmatic guerrilla Debora, discovers he has psychic powers and is recruited by the sinister Psicorps, is trained as an assassin, and finds himself again embroiled with his lover in Free Occupied Guatamala's Petén. As well, he becomes enmeshed in the centuries-long feud between two psychically gifted families, the Sotomayors and the Madradonas. These opposed forces have set their own agenda for bringing about a "peaceful" Earth. Mingolla ends up in the middle of it all, pitted against Dr. Izaguirra, the master manipulator. Finally he ends up not as the Competent Man who puts everything right, but rather the Active Catalyst who sets up an apocalyptic chain of events moving, and who then must escape with the pitifully small human complement he can save. In other words, he fills the role of a real-life hero—he does what he can. No worlds are saved, and certainly no Rambos invoked.

What I meant earlier by this novel beginning as one thing and becoming another. *Life During Wartime* appears to start, in filmic terms, as a sort of *Full Metal Jacket* or even *Hamburger Hill*. What it then turns into is *Apocalypse Now*. Shepard displays bravura writing as he rotates evocative Latin American landscapes, gritty war scenes, intensely



introspective moments in Mingolla's head, and flashes of hallucinogenic power. The book's arena is, of course, a venue for the playing out of far more than just a fatal political adventure. This is not at all merely a near-future projection of a Vietnam-analogue war. It is a crazy game of life and death defined by sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll, automatic weapons, and fragmentation grenades. Shepard cuts to the bone in portraying the battle of sanity to survive in a swampy Vietnam of irrationality. And finally, it's far more about metaphysics than it is slogging through the jungle. Even more finally, *Life During Wartime* ends up dealing with love. Romance, even.

So maybe there *will* be something here for the yupscale reader. Maybe some thoughtfulness. Perhaps a catalyst. One can hope.

Short Takes

Is there a more prolific sf novelist in 1987 than Simon Hawke? His popular Time Wars series chugs merrily along with *The Argonaut Affair* (Ace), his *Psychodrome* series has just kicked off at Berkley, NAL is having him novelize *all* the *Friday the 13th* movies, and Warner/Popular Library has just published what appears to be the first volume of another new series. That's ***The Wizard of 4th Street*** (256 pp., $2.95, ISBN 0-445-20302-1), also announced to become a comic book series with art by Phil Normand. *Wizard* is a pleasant, inoffensive, intermittently charming way to kill an hour or two. As that terrible saying goes, it's "a good read." I mention it because the book is very much in the fantasy tradition of the old DeCamp/Pratt *Incomplete Enchanter* sorts of tales. The tone feels like that Hawke creates a post-Collapse America in which magic has returned and become a form of efficient, non-polluting high technology. Within this framework, he sets up an attractive, though at first apparently mis-matched set of young thieves who attempt a big score, botch it horribly, and then get involved in a plot to Destroy the World as We Know It. Arthurian heavyweights Merlin, Modred, and Morgan Le Fay appear in supporting roles. Except for an ending which seems incredibly rushed, the book purrs along just fine. As I said above, it's genuine entertainment.

Masques II edited by J. N. Williamson (Maclay & Associates, Inc., PO Box 16253, Baltimore, MD 21210, 221 pp., $19.95, ISBN 0-940776-24-3) is the perfect travel book. This anthology contains twenty-six brand-new stories, most fairly short and thus perfect for the commuter attention span. More, the book's bound in reflective silver and will work as an adequate heliograph should the reader be stranded and need to signal for help.

Actually it's the brevity of the stories which is the anthology's weakness. One can't quarrel with the names on the contents page. Stephen King's here, Ramsey Campbell and Robert Bloch, both Mathesons, Richard and Richard Christian, James Herbert, Joe R. Lansdale, William F. Nolan, Ray Russell, Ardath Mayhar, Steve Rasnic Tem, and more. Unfortunately many of the contributions seem more sketches, discrete images, and slices of death than actual stories. There are a few such as Steve Rasnic Tem's "Hidey Hole" which compress everything a story needs into about a thousand words. But more are promising near misses, such as Thomas Sullivan's "The Man Who Drowned Puppies" which tries for Shirley Jackson country without that lady's delicate steel, or David B. Silva's "Ice Sculptures," an eight-cylinder engine hitting on only seven.

Don't shed any tears for Williamson and company, though. *Masques II* is still a perfectly fine testing lab for the new and high of potential. Thus are the perimeters of dark fantasy expanded ■

ILLUMINATIONS



ILLUSTRATION BY PETER R. EMSHWILLER

REPORT FROM THE HARMONIC CONVERGENCE

In the course of the last two centuries the world should have ended dozens of times, to hear prophets and doomsayers tell it. But only rarely has the message of disaster been as widely heard as the one presented as the down-side of the last summer's Harmonic Convergence.

We visited the convergence in Central Park. While there, we took part—against our will—in a crystal-cleaning ceremony led by a bearded man in a tie-dyed t-shirt. Guitar players—most of them *very* amateur—grew more and more numerous as the day wore on. One heckler passing by shouted that Elvis (whose birthday it was) was going to return and shock the world with a claim that he was Jesus. When we left everyone seemed quite calm and sure that they were making a difference.

The day ended with a good deal less fanfare than it began, and the next day's ceremonies were hardly covered at all. There will be no way of telling if a cataclysmic disaster was averted, except by waiting for twenty-oh-five.

A lot of things can happen in the next twenty-five years. By the year 2012, the debate over whether to call that year —and the eighty-seven or so that follow it—"two thousand and" or "twenty," followed by the final digits, should finally be resolved. We may or may not be in outer space by then. We may figure out what the Loch Ness Monster is. Any number of events might come to pass. But there are those among us who think they know exactly what might happen if a series of prayers voiced on that weekend last August don't work: the end of the world.

For those who've forgotten the term in the months since, the Harmonic Convergence was a celestial event foreseen in a vision by Jose Arguelles, a student of Mayan astrology. Arguelles said that at dawn on August sixteenth the Earth was going to pass through a beam of cosmic energy focused through an alignment of stars roughly in the shape of the Star of David. (The beam of energy, supposedly, is 5,125 lightyears in diameter.) While bathed in that energy, he said, the world and mankind would have the opportunity to choose the path that it would follow into the next millennium. This, he claimed, would be the first time in 23,412 years that the planets would align in such a manner. The event was also foretold, according to its promoters, in the Aztec, Mayan, and Hopi Indian calendars of pre-Colombian times. Supposedly, if 144,000 true-believers did not gather to pray in various locations across the world on that weekend in August, we would miss our last opportunity to kick over into a phase that would allow us to ascend to the next level of spiritual enlightenment.

When the weekend of the sixteenth arrived, New Age believers assembled at key points along the earth's power lines and raised their voices in prayer. The message? Good thoughts. It really didn't matter what the thoughts were, just as long as they were heartfelt wishes of good will and healing energy. The news media ate it up as worshippers of almost every religion flocked to Stonehenge, the Great Pyramids, and New York's Central Park on one of the hottest days in years.

So, did the ceremony work? Will the world survive? We'll just have to wait and see.

—*Robert Simpson*

ILLUMINATIONS



SPACE PATROL FOR THE KING AND THE BOSS

What horror novelist Stephen King and rock musician Bruce Springsteen had in common before now was the dark. King lurked in it, Springsteen danced in it.

Now, they also have in common that each of them rates an entry in the 1987 edition of the *World Book Encyclopedia*.

"We look over the area of popular culture and try to determine how many of these people have staying power,' said Dick Harmet, *World Book*'s executive editor. "We like to acknowledge people we think are going to stay around.'

Harmet said *World Book* is confident that, even years and years from now, people are still going to be shivering at King's novels—and would be disappointed if they couldn't find boo about Stephen King in the encyclopedia.

And so it was the encyclopedia's editors went on "space patrol" in King's behalf, he said. Space patrol means to hunt through all twenty-two volumes of "a lot of specific information" to find ways to condense what's already there, in order to make room for something new."

How good is *World Book*'s record at predicting which famous names are going to be remembered?

Harmet points to the encyclopedia's entries on science fiction and fantasy writers Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, and Robert Heinlein, and to musicians Chuck Berry, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones, as well as another couple of recent "space patrol" veterans: movie directors George Lucas and Steven Spielberg.

Also, he notes a personal reason for thinking King's books are likely to last.

"They scare the hell out of me," Harmet said.

—*Ron Wolfe*

FLYING HIGH

"De plane, Boss, de plane!"

Those famous words, yelped by Herve Villechaize in the role of Tattoo on *Fantasy Island*, are going to mean something Mr. Rourke never dared to fantasize.

Fantasy Island was the 1978–84 TV series about a tropical paradise, where the mysterious Mr. Rourke (Ricardo Montalban) made peoples dreams come true.

Each week, another planeload of guests would arrive on the island, and Mr. Rourke's midget-sized assistant, Tattoo, would yell from the bell tower that "de plan'" was about to land.

What do you suppose ever happened to de plan'—a two hundred thousand dollar seaplane with Corinthian leather seats—after the series ended?

It was bought by a drug dealer in California, who wanted an airplane to use for hauling cocaine.

Later, caught and sent to prison, the dealer turned informant on some alleged cocaine distributors, and the result was one of the biggest "sting" operations in the history of the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous



PHOTO © 1980 UNIVERSAL CITY STUDIOS

Drugs

The plane? It was forfeited to the Oklahoma drug enforcement agency, along with about one hundred ten thousand bucks in cash—as neat a package as Mr Rourke could have put together himself

But with narcs in the sky, a call of "de plane!" isn't going to mean time for mango-colored drinks and floral leis, the way it did before.

What the heck, we'd might as well go ahead and spoil the rest of the illusion. The "island" in *Fantasy Island*, in fact, is a public park called The Aboretum, about twenty-five miles out of Los Angeles.

—*Ron Wolfe*

UPTIGHT? HIRE A BUNNY

Hard work and dedication are not often rewarded in the corporate world, but we're happy to report that the Halsted Organization, a Los Angeles public relations firm, recently named its in-house rabbit—Zelda, a French lop—the corporation's Stress Management Consultant. According to vp Wendy Basil, office tensions have eased considerably since the eleven pound bunny began his daily commute to the firm. (That's right, he—Zelda's a boy. He was named before his true sexual identity became apparent, before he began exhibiting distinctly unladylike behavior.)

Zelda's talents became obvious during a stint as volunteer, when he made a point of greeting the mail carrier and UPS deliveryman at the door. Later, his mere presence defused tense meetings, and all he did was hop on the conference table to listen in. Employees instinctively sought the rabbit out after a difficult telephone conversations, and found that they felt better after they bent Zelda's long, silky ears. And—unlike a lot of other attractive employees—Zelda enjoyed being petted by strangers.



So Halsted has written Zelda an official job description. His duties include on-site and off-site stress management consultation—Halsted has generously extended Zelda's services to the adjacent ad agency, photography, and set design studio personnel. The only place Zelda isn't welcome is a certain design office, where, as a baby, he had an unfortunate accident on a project that'd been left on the floor. This unforgiving attitude is really unnecessary, since Zelda is now completely litter box-trained, just like a cat.

Zelda is also available as a bunnysitter for employees' children, which, Basil maintains, has boosted productivity at the firm.

Halsted's public image has been much enhanced by Zelda's charismatic presence, too. The company features him in its promotions, which usually nets Zelda a rash of invitations to lunch or drinks. People even leave messages for him on the answering machine, says Basil.

Although there can be drawbacks to employing bunnies ("He chews up your pencils if you're not careful," Basil says), they make considerate co-workers. "They're very silent, even when you step on their feet," she says. (Except when they mate, when they make oinking sounds . . . but that's something Zelda *wouldn't* do at the office.)

Zelda lives quietly in West Hollywood with his girlfriend, Diva. They have no children.

—*Deborah Quilter*

ILLUMINATIONS



DANCING HERE IN LIMBO

The invitation came with a bright red feather stapled to it. It enjoined me to come as my "higher self" to a Tribal Pow-Wow of the Gods—complete with Afro-Caribbean music by the spirit Ensemble, an alien Master of Ceremonies trance-channeled to Earth from a far-off planet, and a limbo contest.

I'd have to be an absolute unfeeling nerd not to go, right?

Right.

So I went, on a steamy summer night, to the Westbeth Theater Center in lower Manhattan, prepared for a scene. I wandered in through a doorway, following people who wore tie-dyed t-shirts and feathers in their hair. Inside, I admired a lady's orchids, and she hung a lei around my neck.

I *knew* I was in the right place.

I looked up and saw a woman on the dance floor wearing a minimalist halter, a tutu made of plastic bananas, and rhinestone-studded high-heel shoes with four-inch spikes.

Not far away Iris Kitzgil—the spirit entity from the planet Murray who served as MC—was holding court. She wore a stunning costume that resembled a kimono, topped by a feathered gold turban (see photo above).

Iris told me about life back home. "We don't have bodies there," she explained. So she appeared in the body of Roz Winter, a fabulous New York jingle singer (see photo, right.) Iris loves visiting Earth, and does so whenever Roz—who has to go into a deep trance for Iris to channel through to Earth—will oblige.

Roz would let Iris visit more often, said Iris, if Iris didn't eat so much. But where Iris comes from, overeating isn't a problem. "On Murray, we can eat whatever we want without gaining weight," she said, pointing up the advantages of immateriality. She went on to say that she has a recipe for chocolate tofu layer cake that tastes just like Entenmann's.

Iris cleans auras, too. "I shine white light on them and they feel better," she said, waving a blue plastic flashlight inscribed with the Bell Telephone logo. (The flashlight had been imported, she said, to Murray from Earth.)

Then she stepped too close to one of the primitive masks that hung on the wall, and came away with long threads of glue clinging to her hands and silk kimono—er, that is, clinging to her Murrayan costume.

A limbo contest wound up the evening, led by the Limbo King himself, Mike Quashie.

For non-dancers, there was conversation—all of it weird, most of it captivating. One woman, who described herself as a psychologist/singer, said that extraterrestrials were sending emissaries to heal Mother Earth from the ravages of insecticides and other bad vibes. For all she knew, said the psychologist/singer, there might even be a few emmisaries at the party. "A lot of it seems like silliness," she went on, "but basically, the extraterrestrials are no different from us."

—*Deborah Quilter*



PHOTO BY CHARLES BARBARNELL

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ON THE CUTTING EDGE: DENNIS E

By STANLEY WIATER

Although he's primarily known for his award-winning tales of dark fantasy, Dennis Etchison has had more than his share of "horror stories" as a professional writer. Until a few years ago, the man whom Publisher's Weekly *termed capable of "the state of the art in modern horror" was perhaps the best-kept secret in the field. The difficulties he's had in getting his career to its present state of widespread acceptance would have broken a lesser talent. Examples: his first collection of short stories,* The Night of the Eye, *never went beyond the cover proof, the publisher, Powell Books, went bankrupt as the book was going to press. When his novelization of John Carpenter's 1980 film* The Fog *was published in England, his name was misspelled as 'Etchinson' (He went on to write three other novelizations as "Jack Martin") Then his first serious attempt at a novel,* The Shudder, *was shelved after more than two years of rewriting and editing for its intended publisher.*

Regardless, Etchison has spent the last twenty-five years steadily carving out an enviable reputation with his short fiction, finding regular acceptance in such notable anthologies as Whispers *and* The Year's Best Horror Stories. *(And winning numerous awards—the very first with an essay at age twelve.) Finally, with the publication in 1982 of his critically acclaimed collection* The Dark Country, *Etchison had undeniably arrived. Charles L. Grant calls him "the best short story writer in the field today, bar none," while Ramsey Campbell has stated, "Dennis Etchison is the finest writer of short stories working in his field, and the rest of us ought to learn from him."*

Since The Dark Country, *two more collections—*Red Dreams *and* The Blood Kiss—*have appeared in hardcover from Scream/Press* Darkside, *his first novel which was not a novelization or written under a pseudonym, was published in 1986 by Berkley Books. He has also edited three anthologies:* Cutting Edge *(Doubleday), and the two-volume* Masters of Darkness *(Tor), with more anthologies—and short stories—in progress. He is also supervising a series of comic book adaptations of Clive Barker's* Books of Blood.

Etchison, who was born in Stockton, California in 1943, is also at work as a screenwriter on two film projects: another addition to John Carpenter's successful Halloween *series, and a yet untitled original project for Carpenter which Etchison tentatively describes as "a science fiction suspense story." Anyone meeting with him will find a cautious yet eloquent conversationalist with the look and manner of a born survivor.*

WIATER: Knowing of your past frustrations in Hollywood, why are you still writing scripts? We understand you were even a staff writer for HBO's *The Hitchhiker* series for a time, though none of your own stories were ever adapted.

ETCHISON: My greatest interest since the age of ten has been to direct movies. Writing has always been of considerably less interest to me—though I take it very, very seriously. And it seems the best way to have a shot at directing is through screenwriting. I *love* movies, which is one of the reasons why I remain a resident of Los Angeles. Incidentally, even though I found myself in the horror field sort of by accident, I just want to state that although in the past I may have given the impression that I don't really consider myself a "horror writer," that my interests "are much greater than that" and all the rest of it, I'm profoundly grateful to the field for having offered me a platform I couldn't find elsewhere. I'm deeply indebted to it.

WIATER: Fair enough. Even so, is that primarily why you became involved with novelizations for *The Fog, Hallo-*





A CONVERSATION WITH TCHISON

ween II. Halloween III [all for John Carpenter], and *Videodrome* for David Cronenberg—because you so admire their work?

ETCHISON: That's right. I turned down a lot of other offers. I was very pleased when John Carpenter asked me to do one, because I very much wanted to meet him and work with him. In most cases, novelizers don't work with the filmmakers; in many cases they don't even *see* the film—they're only working from an early script. I worked on that novelization while viewing dailies and various versions of the edited picture in post-production. The same thing happened with *Halloween II* and *Halloween III*. Then the opportunity to do *Videodrome* had a powerful appeal. I think Cronenberg's as intelligent as anyone working in the film industry today, either in or out of the genre. I was able to go to Toronto and view the film in various stages, and talk to him at length about it. It was a delightful opportunity, but I don't see myself doing any more novelizations. I did the very best I could with them, and in many ways they're more than "just" novelizations—at least in my mind.

WIATER: Early in your career, you were beginning to establish yourself as a "science fiction writer," as indicated by your appearances in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Fantastic*, *Orbit*, and so forth. Now you're best known as a "horror writer." Whatever happened to those early science fiction stories?

ETCHISON: Those stories appear throughout the three collections I've published to date. They're "soft" science fiction rather than "hard" or high-tech, but they *are* science fiction stories. I simply found that the market had changed as time went on. My writing remained the same in its premises, but I was forced to seek new outlets. I think my writing is all of a piece—it's just the markets that seem to change. I discuss this in detail in my introduction to *Cutting Edge*. I basically never set out to be a "science fiction writer" or any other *kind* of writer. I just considered myself a writer. But because I grew up on science fiction and loved it so much, I did write a number of science fiction stories. I still do—only no one seems to notice! But I also wrote "mainstream" stories and "weird/dark" stories. It just so happened that the markets in the science fiction field changed, and at the same time the renaissance in the horror and dark fantasy field happened. And so I found myself received much more warmly there. But these are really marketing definitions; I don't think they truly describe the nature of my work. The problem is with critical and commercial *boundaries*, not with quality or content.

WIATER: True enough; so what do you feel is so special about the anthologies you've edited?

ETCHISON: In *Masters of Darkness*, I asked authors to pick personal favorites of theirs in the area of dark fantasy, and to write an afterword to each story. What was particularly interesting to me was what happened when I asked for contributions from writers who are more closely associated with "science fiction" than they are with "horror." Because as I stated in the introduction, it seems to me that no serious writer's work can fall easily into one camp or another. Many of the writers—such as Joe Haldeman or Damon Knight or George R.R. Martin or Jack Dann—are most commonly thought of as science fiction writers. Whereas they have all written a number of very dark and disturbing stories which very easily could have been published in the horror field. I'm not concerned with furthering the gentrification of literature—I'd much rather break down the barriers between the genres. That's the way *my* career has always been—I've never considered myself a member of just one camp. This philosophy applies to *Cutting Edge* as well, because I don't see any advantage now to continuing these barriers. I want to encourage a new openness and lack of prejudice in the reader.

ETCHISON

WIATER: *Cutting Edge* has been received quite well, from all reports. Some critics consider it the boldest anthology in the field since Kirby McCauley's *Dark Forces*. We know you definitely have a sequel in the works.

ETCHISON: I just received the final ballots for the World Fantasy Awards, and it's been nominated three times. Once for Best Anthology/Collection, and two of the stories for Best Short Story. It was a Literary Guild alternate, and I know there were other book club editions—I wish I had them! [Laughs] And there's been a paperback sale, and foreign sales, and the very good sales in the original hardcover edition—you'd have to say it was a successful book.

I'm also working on an anthology for Lord John Press, which is probably the most distinguished specialty press in America, outside of the genre. It publishes signed limited editions from authors like John Updike and John Cheever, Joyce Carol Oates—the major names in American letters. And they've never done anything connected with the genre. The anthology, called *Lord John Ten*, is not in the genre either; it's the tenth anniversary of the press, and includes those names as well as new stories by the likes of Whitley Strieber and Jack Dann. It's an eclectic collection that spans mainstream literature as well as some of the finest representatives of our field.

WIATER: Tell us a little about your influences as a child.

ETCHISON: When I was ten I read "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" by Ambrose Bierce. *That* had a powerful effect on me. When I was eleven, I began reading Ray Bradbury, which produced an incomparable, life-changing result. And Bradbury led me into reading Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, A.E. Van Vogt, and a number of wonderful science fiction writers. Of course those were the 1950s, when science fiction was happening; it was a growing field.

WIATER: We understand that you were once a student under the late, great Charles Beaumont.

ETCHISON: Well, being such a fan of Beaumont, I was struck to see his name in the UCLA Extension catalog in 1963 as the teacher of a workshop for science fiction. I immediately signed up for the course, and spent ten weeks—one night a week—listening to him teach. It was a wonderful experience. I spoke to him after each class, and he would always say, "Some of us are going out for a drink, why don't you join us?" And I had an old car, old clothes, and no money, and I was young and embarrassed, so I turned him down. I didn't realize he was ill then, and within a year after that he was desperately sick, and died four years later of a complicated form of Alzheimer's disease. But he was a great influence on me, especially in the way he brought many writers whom I admired—including Bradbury and Matheson—to speak at the workshop.

Twenty years later, I had the opportunity to teach at UCLA Extension myself, and I began with a science fiction, horror, and fantasy workshop. Which in my mind was a continuation of Beaumont's class, and was my way of paying Beaumont back for the class he had taught in 1963. I'm still teaching that class today, and bringing many of those same writers in again to speak, as well as his son Chris (who is now a successful television writer and producer), Richard Christian Matheson, and other representatives of a new generation. In fact, this coming January I'll be putting together a ronference on the campus at which several major horror writers have been invited to appear.

"... The human animal may be programmed for self-defeat on a level that is not accessible to consciousness or mutable by will."

WIATER: Considering some of the "horror stories" you've experienced in real life in terms of the publishing and film business, just what *has* kept you going as a writer?

ETCHISON: For one thing, the realization that some of that "bad luck" may have been brought about, unconsciously, by me. It's easy to blame others when you have bad luck, but when you stop and analyze what's happened to you, you may realize that it was just as much your fault as the rest of the world's. So that only makes you resolve to not make those mistakes again, and to try a little harder. J.G. Ballard has spoken of life as a search for psychological closure, and Philip K. Dick suggested that we may be unconsciously seeking a kind of stasis or dead-end, a corner into which we've painted ourselves and from which there is finally no escape. This is the most chilling concept I have ever encountered—that our best efforts at growth, self-help, health, and progress may in fact be designed, albeit unconsciously, to achieve quite the opposite: to bring about our own entrapment and defeat. In other words, that what we **think** we are doing and what we are *actually* doing may be diametrically opposed, that the human animal may be programmed for self-defeat on a level that is not accessible to consciousness or mutable by will. Not just that the unconscious may throw up barriers and obstacles, out of some deep-seated conviction that we do not deserve to win, but that the unconscious may ultimately *refuse to allow* our success because it is pre-programmed toward a different goal or purpose that we may never know and might not be able to comprehend. I pray to God that this is not true, but you never know.

Also, people who are in the arts like to pontificate that we're doing it out of some deep spiritual commitment *and we are!* But we are also doing it because, after a while, it's the only thing left that we can do in the world professionally! I never knew it was going to be as hard as it's turned out to be, but after a certain number of years have passed—and you're still working at your profession—you realize that you had better finish what you started and continue onward. The truth of the matter is, what else is left for you? Also I love the arts. I really feel *committed* to them, almost in a spiritual sense. There's a line which Ray Bradbury has quoted over the years: "There are two honorable professions in the world: doctors, because they heal the body, and artists, because they heal the soul." I just love doing this and, if the truth be told, I wouldn't have it any other way.

WIATER: But you've been a published writer since you were in your teens, and only now is the general reading public being made aware of your talents.

ETCHISON: Well, writers are different from other people in one respect: the rewards for our labors are not seen for a long time. Sometimes many years. So we end up learning to operate on faith. "The principle of deferred gratification." Everyone else who has a job receives a paycheck at a regular time; if you're an actor you receive the applause immedi-

ately after the performance. A writer will wait months, at the very least, before he receives any kind of feedback. So you learn early on as a writer to go by this principle of not expecting much in the way of feedback or gratification. You become toughened, and learn to operate solely out of faith. In that sense, it is a spiritual profession.

WIATER: But you have no regrets, overall, for the sacrifices you've made to get this far?

ETCHISON: I have plenty of regrets! But it just . . . is. You know? Why wonder if I would ever do it all over again? I never knew what I was doing as I was *doing* it. I was following a path that presented itself to me, and I didn't understand where it was leading me. But this is *reality*. Looking back, I realize that having a very unstable source of employment is probably the major factor in costing me a wife and family, which is what I've always wanted. I've never had a wife or a family. I've wanted that devoutly for twenty years, but I've never been able to find anybody who would commit to the vagaries of my lifestyle. That's a serious loss and sadness inside me, the fact that I don't have a family, but I suppose there's some higher reason for all this having worked out the way it has. God has some plan here, and I don't know what it is . . . perhaps to Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite . . . But here we are, you know? Whether you like it or not, here we are. You'd damn well better embrace your lot or commit suicide. There's no other choice.

WIATER: We heard that you've actually *dreamed* the writing of entire short stories.

ETCHISON: Yes, that's happened several times, and I'd like to know how many other writers have had this experience. If they have, it might be a very good idea for an anthology. Much of my work contains images or details that come from dreams. I even had the peculiar experience of dreaming the typewritten manuscript in two or three cases—I saw the entire story already written out in my dream! Examples include "Time Killer" and "The Night of the Eye," which I saw typed out for me in my dream in manuscript form. I find that fascinating. In fact, I must tell you that my novel *Darkside* originated with a dream I had one night a few years ago in which I dreamed a Stephen King novel that doesn't really exist, it's never been written. But I dreamed I was involved in a certain kind of suburban paranoia. And I thought to myself as I was dreaming, "If I could just get this all down, it would be a great novel!" As it turned out, *Darkside* had little to do with that unwritten King novel, though the aspects of a new family in a well-to-do suburban setting being menaced by teenagers comes directly from that dream. [Laughs] God only knows where this all comes from! Maybe Plato was right. Or Phil Dick, who toyed with the idea that time is running backward and that all this has happened before.

WIATER: Considering you're a past winner of the World Fantasy Award and the British Fantasy Award, what do you think sets your work apart from others working in horror or so-called "dark fantasy"?

ETCHISON: That's really something



for the critics to decide. But at least my readers know that *I'm not kidding*. That I'm serious. As long as you're only trying to fulfill what you perceive are the needs of the marketplace, you're not going to be anything but a hack—even if it's a high order hack. Those writers who are true artists speak as honestly as possible about their deepest and most passionate concerns. Those who learn the technical skills to do that vividly then are considered exciting and important artists. I often write about the "unreal," but I'm trying to write about it as *realistically* as possible. That seems to me to be different than what some other writers are doing, who are trying to write about that which is real, but write about it unrealistically. I don't know if there's really a distinction, but I am attempting to write "realistically about the unreal." For what it's worth, I'd call myself a "Romantic Realist," a term I've coined, if that means anything to you.

WIATER: It's been noted that your work deals predominately with psychological, rather than supernatural, fears and loathings. Can you give us an example of a story directly inspired by a real-life incident?

ETCHISON: Oh, yes. "The Chill" was written after I saw a pair of tennis shoes sitting on the sidewalk, a policeman directing traffic, and a crowd gathering around. I then noticed that there was a huge dent in this car parked at the curb, and then I saw there was a canvas thrown over a body in the gutter. Then somebody told me that a man had jumped off the top of the building—had hit the street so hard that it knocked him out of his tennis shoes—and then the body had bounced on top of the car. The fact that that building was adjacent to a health food store, where I was headed to have lunch, was particularly provocative. [Laughs] The juxtaposition of life and death in that one building . . . ! But just as many stories come out of my dreams, or an experience of looking out a window at something.

It's all part of my memory. Usually I see the entire story flash in front of me in the space of a few seconds. I never know when it's going to happen. But I've trained myself to recognize and hold on to those moments. It may take years to explore that "flash" and nail it to the page in its most perfect form. In a larger sense, we may all be spending our entire lives writing only one story, the finest story we know: one with ourselves as hero rather than victim or arch-enemy. As D.W. Griffith said, "What you get is a living, what you give is a life." It's up to each of us to try and make it worth reading—or living.

WIATER: You've certainly had your share of highs and lows over the years, though it seems you're at last receiving your due share of success. As a writing instructor, what advice to you give to beginning writers?

ETCHISON: It just seems to me that you don't ever make a conscious decision to be an artist. You either wake up one day and realize that's what you are or you don't. If that's the case, then nothing can stop you from doing it. And if you're not that kind, then no amount of external rules or enforced discipline is going to force you to it. The motivation is internal, and the rewards are personal. I would also say *Never give up*. A lot of my students put a story away after only two or three rejections. I once had a story rejected seventy-two times; it took me six and a half years to sell it. But I *did*. It's like going to a party where there are sixty people. You can't expect to please all of them. But if you can just meet the right one, then you can forget the fifty-nine others you never connected with. ■



Call 666

What happens when murder is just a phone call away?

DENNIS ETCHISON

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER SCANLAN

He awoke to the sound of a chainsaw.

On the other side of the window trees fell, leaves and branches scratching the glass like ragged fingernails. Then horns began to bleat as traffic locked bumpers behind the defoliation trucks. He lay there gripping the mattress and waited for it to stop. It did not.

The dreaming was over.

As he started up out of bed, a bell rang.

For a moment it seemed to come from outside, the clanging of another steel blade. Then, as more trees fell away and the room was filled with light, he saw the telephone vibrating on the table.

He hesitated, considering the plastic surfaces, the lines and curves molded so invitingly to fit his hand.

But it was a sucker play. He wouldn't be fooled again. Sometimes, for a few minutes in the morning, it was as if he had never met her, had not lost so much already. Now his eyes were open.

He remembered the pressure of her voice in his ear, more strident and controlling these last weeks than ever before. The accusations, the demands, the offers made and withdrawn—day and night, until he could hardly bring himself to lift the receiver. Finally the pretense of civility, the affected businesslike tone, punctuated by her ironic snickers, that was an old trick she employed to pass off her cynicism as humor. It had taken him years to hear the naked calculation behind her abrasive laughter. Last night he had listened to her voice as an abstraction of pitch and inflection, and finally decided that he did not want it near his face. He had let the handset drop back into its cradle, not knowing if he would ever be able to bear the weight of it again.

It rang.

And rang.

He stood in the rays of the sun that now shone through the unprotected bedroom window, feeling nothing.

The trucks moved on.

After a while he dressed and left for work.

He told the receptionist to hold all calls and tried to lose himself in the morning round of mail. There were magazines and newsletters, written by people who knew a great deal more about his job than he, to thumb through and discard. There were invoices, there were queries. These he dispatched to the tops of skewed piles that teetered under the fluorescent lighting and threatened to collapse in several directions at once, burying his desk beneath an avalanche of message slips and unopened envelopes. By eleven his skin was flushed and tingling from too much coffee. When he left the office quietly for an early lunch, no one noticed.

Half-way down the block he stopped at an electronics store to inquire about an answering machine, one that would allow him to monitor his home calls undetected. He chose the first model without opening the carton, and by the time he had paid for it and carried it outside he felt greatly relieved.

Now the sidewalk was filling with impatient shoppers and live wires. Accountants and legal secretaries in search of the perfect salad bar passed him by without a glance, chattering to the point of hyperventilation about perks and vacations. Holding his new purchase as if it were a shield, he avoided them and crossed the street to the park.

It was a brilliantly clear day, the air as bright as beaten aluminum above the denuded palm trees. He found a secluded trail apart from the bikepath and followed it around the lake, past slatted benches speckled with shadows that were like a pattern of burnished coins moving over the dirt and old wood. Here amid the dense undergrowth he found an illusion of camouflage, even the rumbling of traffic receded till it seemed to be far away. Through the dark foliage of loquat, hibiscus, and oleander he saw a man baiting a line for his son, the hook glinting hotly before it was covered by a wriggling worm. A teenager on a skateboard clacked along the cement bank while small fish played just below the water's silver surface. Behind him leaves rustled, twigs broke, but he ignored such sounds. There could be no danger in this place. He breathed deeply and walked on, at peace for the first time in recent memory.

He came out at the end of the trail,

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666

near an underpass connecting the park to a section of the city that had yet to suffer redevelopment. On the other side of the street storefronts had been converted to ethnic restaurants with cramped counters and takeout menus. The windows were papered with daily luncheon specials. He could not read them from here, but surely one would be worth trying. There was even a movie theater in the middle of the block, an aging art deco palace that now showed mindless exploitation films. ALL SEATS $1.50/IT'S COOL INSIDE!

He wondered whether he would be missed if he did not return to the office at all today.

As he started into the underpass, a telephone rang.

He hunched his shoulders and turned, eyes wide.

At the entrance to the passage, so covered with graffiti that it seemed a part of the darkness, was a pay phone.

He moved away from it.

Many other times he had passed public telephones that rang for no apparent reason, with no one around to answer. Crossed lines, probably, misdialed numbers; he had never known. But he had been curious.

Now it rang again, a harsh metallic vibrato magnified by the walls of the tunnel to the pitch of a scream.

Well, why not? he thought. What's there to worry about out here?

The warm plastic molded itself to his fingers.

"Hello?" he said.

The voice on the other end of the line mumbled a number.

"What?"

The voice said something else, a longer number followed by a word. It sounded like an address.

"I think you have the wrong person."

"Who is this?"

"Who's *this*?" he said.

Click.

He held the receiver at arm's length.

Now only a dial tone came from the black earpiece.

He hung up.

I shouldn't have answered, he thought. It was none of my business. The voice had sounded angry.

He backed into the tunnel. The telephone grew smaller in the center of a circle, as though he were sighting through the wrong end of a telescope.

Then the foliage parted. A figure emerged from the trail, cracking twigs underfoot. The foliage closed. A man hurried to the pay phone and stood there checking his watch, trying to catch his breath.

A few seconds later the phone rang again.

The man answerd it immediately.

"HELLO. I'M NOT HOME RIGHT NOW, BUT you may leave—"

He stopped the machine and rewound the tape. Shouldn't tell people I'm not home, he thought. I might be robbed that way.

He pressed the *Record* button, raised the microphone and tried again.

"Hello. I can't come to the phone but you may leave a message when you hear the tone. Thank you for calling."

Beep.

He replayed the loop to be sure it had recorded, then set the dial to *Answer*.

There. He was ready.

He opened a beer, turned on the television, crossed the living room and sat down in his big chair.

The evening newscast rattled on about bombings, resignations, investigations and the like. More of the same. It was getting bad out there, worse every day. As he scanned the newspaper he used his remote control to lower the volume to a steady drone.

The TV reporter was saying something about ritual mutilations of the homeless in the tunnels under Glendale and Atwater, when he noticed an item at the top of page four. A body had been found in a bedroom in another part of the city, the victim of an apparent burglary attempt. He did not recognize the person's name, nor was the scene of the crime anywhere near this neighborhood. Yet something about the story held his attention.

It took him a minute to figure it out.

Today, in the park, the voice on the other end of the line had said an address. Another number first, a code of some kind, then a street and house number.

It was the address in the newspaper. The same. He was sure.

He set the paper aside and turned up the volume on the television set. He sat there flipping channels, checking the other newscasts for more details of the murder.

If he told the police, what good would it do? He had intercepted a call by mistake, nothing more. There was no way of knowing where that call had come from or the identity of the man who had finally answered it.

His own phone began to ring. It rang repeatedly in the course of the evening. Each time he knew who it would be even before the machine took over. He did not bother listening to what she had to say.

If he told the police, what good would it do? There was no way of knowing where the call had come from.

THE NEXT MORNING HE CALLED IN SICK. Scattered joggers in warm-up suits were already out, running the bikepath with anal-retentive abandon, as he parked and walked briskly to the park. He slowed self-consciously and slipped out of their line of sight as quickly as possible.

It was early and the untrimmed bowers had kept the old trail cool and damp through the night. Nearing the underpass, he glanced back: no one was behind him. Through the branches the lake was oddly dim under the low-angled morning light. Then he squinted and saw that there was no longer a surface of water. Since yesterday it had been drained completely. Now the cement lip curved down to a depth of no more than three or four feet. A layer of shiny black mud coated the artificial bottom, heavy with beer cans and the unrecognizable detritus of years: an open wound for all to see. He shuddered and looked away, and pressed ahead to the end.

He waited, but no one came near the public telephone.

The last time it had rung at eleven-thirty. A prearranged hour? That would be safe, since the regular lunch crowd did not show up until twelve or so. He tried to remember details about the nervous man who had appeared barely a minute late. Was he from one of the glass office buildings nearby? It was impossible to say. The man had looked like hundreds of others; he could have been anyone.

The morning passed without incident. He found a soft newspaper and

sat half-concealed by the bushes, pretending to read. Eventually the joggers were replaced by street children. They waded out into the lakebed, sifting the marm for valuables before workers arrived in a city truck and scared them off. The air began to ripen with the sweet stink of fish flopping and drying in the silt. And still he waited.

At precisely eleven-thirty, the phone rang.

Before he could get up to answer it, a dark figure disengaged from the walls of the tunnel. How long had someone been standing there? His chest tightened at the sudden knowledge that he was not alone.

This time it was a woman.

Her eyes showed too much white as she fumbled the phone to her ear. She was dressed roughly, a denim jacket and grass-stained jeans with a rolled-up newspaper in the back pocket. Had she been sleeping in the park? A serrated leaf, caught in a strand of her unwashed hair, twisted and curled as she cupped the mouthpiece and listened.

"Yeah," she said.

Then she repeated a three-digit number. The same number the voice had said when he answered yesterday. The code.

She took out the rolled-up newspaper, scribbled something with a felt-tip pen, and tore off the corner of the page.

Then she hung up.

When her footsteps reached the other end of the tunnel, he went to the phone.

He studied it, searching for clues. The gang writing scratched into the coin box was as indecipherable as hieroglyphics.

Ring, he thought.

But it did not. There was no need today. The message had been received the first time.

He slammed the phone with his fist.

There was a tinkling sound in the mechanism, and a quarter clattered out of the coin return.

He scooped it up reflexively.

A lot of good that would do him.

He hesitated, then turned toward the underpass.

Too late. She was gone by now, all the way through and lost on the teeming streets. He peered into the long tunnel. Reflections of unseen traffic undulated along the walls, smearing the darkness with concentric circles.

So what? It's none of my business.....

He heard the great steel sides of a bus passing on the other side, felt a rush of air, saw the trash in the tunnel blowing like undersea streamers: empty wrappers, paper bags, styrofoam cups, fanning magazines.

Among the sticky debris gathering at his feet was a rolled-up newspaper.

The one from her back pocket?

He picked it up.

It was a sleazy vending-machine tabloid, full of advertisements for adult bookstores, escort agencies, and outcall massage parlors.

The corner of the top page was torn off. Next to the missing piece was an ad for a telephone sex service. Something had been scrawled there, over the picture of a nude blonde, with a black marking pen.

A three-digit number.

The same number the voice on the phone had spoken to him yesterday.

And the same one the denim woman had repeated a few minutes ago. The one she had written here.

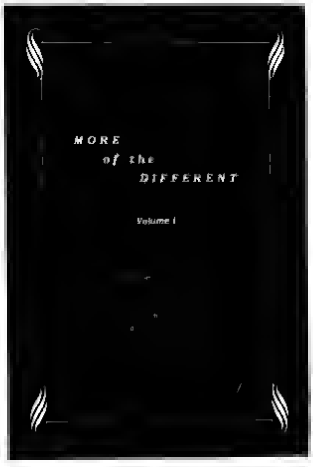
666

He slugged in a coin and dailed the sex service.

"Fantasy Mates. Whatever your number is, we've got it. Do you have an account with us?"

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

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OCCUPATION GHOST BREAKER

by Roger Anker



An untold chapter in the life of author/screenwriter

RICHARD CHRISTIAN MATHESON





"They'd heard a cocktail party drifting like aural smoke through this house . . . only *one* of the items on their list of unnerving complaints. And the first half of the punchline is that, true to the multiple symptoms such houses often suffer, nobody on the block of this suburban neighborhood was having a party.

We are sitting in the living room of author and screenwriter Richard Christian Matheson's home in Woodland Hills, California, discussing the year and a half he had spent in UCLA's Parapsychology Department nearly twelve years ago. And though many of his experiences sound like something out of *Ghostbusters*, Matheson insists they're reality—not fiction.

"The neighborhood was dead," Matheson recalls. "Everybody was inside watching Merv or asleep. So we listened to the family's reportage and asked them to take careful notes. As it was, we figured they were hearing a party that had occurred somewhere in the early nineteen forties . . . because of the music and comments they claimed to hear about figures in the news. The second half of the punchline is that in this house, on that block, at that moment in time, events buried for forty-five years were *alive* again. This house, otherwise quite forgettable, had become like an FM radio, sucking up the nineteen forties. Clinking glasses, Gershwin piano, talk of the war . . . just another night in the ghostchaser biz."

Matheson pauses as he recalls the house. "One very interesting thing is that there was no damage done to the place. But apparitions and poltergeists tend to be a pretty decent crowd on the whole. Fun loving rather than cruel. But with the ones that don't like you . . . it gets . . . memorable."

"We were investigating houses which were purportedly haunted," he explains. "We discovered the majority were phony and we were dealing with people who were in big trouble emotionally, imagining things. But the houses that *were* legitimate afforded us manifestations which were *very* real. In some cases, these manifestations haven't stopped yet. But the bulk of those troubled by such phenomena don't have all four tires on the road."

Matheson looks up, grinning. He is a strikingly handsome young man, whose thirty-two years seem out of proportion to his remarkably successful career as a writer—in the span of little more than a decade, he has seen close to three hundred of his teleplays produced for shows as diverse as *The Incredible Hulk*, *Simon and Simon*, *Magnum*, *Amazing Stories*, and countless others. He's also served as executive story consultant on fifteen prime-time shows including *Quincy*, *Hardcastle and McCormick*, *The A Team*, *Hunter*, and *Riptide*. He's been writer/producer on several other series including *Stingray* and *Stir Crazy*. He regularly contributes fantasy horror stories to major anthologies and magazines and has recently published a collection of twenty-five of his own stories, *Scars and Other Distinguishing Marks*.

His involvement with UCLA began after he had accompanied a friend's metaphysics class which toured the parapsychology lab on a field trip.

Afterward, he had phoned and spoke with the head of the department, a retired Broadway actress named Thelma Moss. "I asked her if they'd done anything with the lab. I confess I thought the work they were doing would make a great series or movie," says Matheson. "Thelma told me they'd been approached by different people from television and film, but nobody had been forthcoming. I told her I'd see what I could do. So, I ended up going on the road with them, and, based upon our experiences, ultimately wrote a pilot for Lorimar which, sadly, the network was afraid of. Too shocking, I suppose."

As he speaks, Matheson is very much at ease, though his eyes are alive with interest, like his father, Richard Matheson—a name synonymous with quality fiction for over thirty years—Richard Christian has held a lifelong interest in the paranormal. "My Dad's rather a self-taught scholar in areas of metaphysics," he says, proudly. 'And as fortune would have it, from the time I was seven or eight, he's been taking me to see astrologers every year for readings . . . so, I got a taste for the 'other side' quite young. I could've worn a pointy hat with stars on it as a child and been very comfortable."

His father has also penned a number of short stories and novels on that subject, including *What Dreams May Come* (a haunting tome about life after death) and *Earthbound* (also about survival of the spirit beyond death). "So, I'd learned an enormous amount from him, prior to UCLA," the younger Matheson says. 'But it was the first time I'd gone through it myself. I found it much scarier than I'd anticipated. In a way, I guess I foolishly thought if you understood something, you weren't frightened by it. One's mind can behave quite oppositely. I was profoundly shaken often. Exploring this realm—really taking that step and entering what feels like a primal scape—isn't like playing with an Ouija board or having your palm read at a carnival. It's not like *The Exorcist* either . . . but somewhere in between. I mean, there's little argument that the majority of it is very innocent;

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32


ANTHONY

BREAK UP

When lovers turn strangers, love must die.

RICHARD CHRISTIAN MATHESON

ILLUSTRATION BY ANTHONY CALDER

They were in bed curled together like children.

That was when he whispered it and her expression quietly tore open. She asked how long he'd felt this way. He gestured without detail and guessed two or three weeks. She stared at him wanting to know how soon he intended to break things off.

Now, he answered, a silhouette in dawn blue.

She gathered the comforter around herself like a funeral shroud and started to cry when he told her the relationship was good but that for reasons he couldn't name, he wanted out.

"I'll change," she offered, sitting higher, ready to negotiate. She grasped a glass of water from her bedside table with pale fingers and told him she could change, be more what he wanted. She'd find a way. She watched for his reaction, optimism trapping her.

He rose and began to dress, telling her it was too late. He needed something different. But even as he said it, in some odd sense he didn't relate to the words. Still, he made no effort to correct the message, though it frightened him.

She tried to understand and told him if he needed time off, to take as much as he required. A weekend. A year. She would wait.

He began buttoning his shirt, tying his tie. She watched as he laced his wing-tips and asked if he would call?

No. He wouldn't say more.

"You can't do this to us!" Her eyes were wide, angry. He was an executioner, sentencing everything they had.

He pulled on his suit coat, sat on the bedside and spoke softly.

"Try to understand. It's not us. It's me. People grow. They want different things. Nothing's forever." He didn't know where the ideas were coming from and felt himself in some grotesque trance.

Sun struck the brass headboard, as if controlled by a catwalk technician, and lit her bloodless lips which parted to free a sound of drowning assassination. "It's someone else, isn't it?"

"No. I'm just feeling different from when we met." He tried to remember when or how they'd met and couldn't. He felt sick.

"We've known each other six months and you've already fallen out of love? What about all the promises? Our plans? Damn you!" She tried to slap him but thoughtlessly drew her fingers into claws and swiped his skin. Three uneven scratches etched war-paint stripes under one eye and he wiped his cheek, smearing a cuff red. He tried to say something—as she watched the blood glide down his hurt face.

"I'm sorry, Jill. Look . . . maybe you're right. Maybe I don't love you anymore . . . I don't know. If I could explain it . . ." He sounded lost, unable to translate himself. ". . . I just have to move on."

She looked poisoned. "Get out. *Now*."

He nodded, grabbed his wallet and keys, looked at her one last time and closed the door behind himself. She caught her reflection in the mirror and threw the bedside clock at her deserted image.

Outside her apartment, he walked toward his car and stopped to lean against the wall in the underground garage. He was nauseous and a spasm broke glass in his stomach. He began to vomit and as he arched over the greasy cement, the sensation felt somehow familiar, the pains like dim memories. He became more sick and tried to think about the conversation he'd just had with . . . but he couldn't recall her name.

Or who she was. Or what they

BREAK UP

had been doing.

He stared down at this right hand, which supported him against the wall as he coughed. But he no longer recognized it, where it had been slight of structure, covered with fine, blond fuzz, it now had black hair on its back and knuckles. The wrists were growing thicker, fingers more powerful, tendons sleek beneath the now tanned skin. He tried to concentrate on where he was and saw an ID bracelet on his wrist. It grew gradually more tight and he unclasped it. On one side was an engraving:

I Love You Madly Jill

He stared at it, thinking, concentrating, unable to place the name. He flipped it and on the other side was another name: David. He felt a flicker of recollection but it vanished in seconds and he was quickly distracted by the feeling of growing taller, more sinewed. He felt an aggressive stream of ideas and sensations filling his mind, things deep inside dying, other things replacing them, taking over, taking control. He sensed he'd been through this hundreds of times, somehow even knew it as the change spread like a perverse warmth, becoming more potent, settling within his cells, becoming them.

He stopped vomiting. Stood straight.

He was inches taller, pounds heavier. His face had broadened, the nose now more flat. A heavy stubble had come in and he felt his face, probing at the red wounds on his cheek as they filled in and closed. He ran strong hands through hair that was now long and curly as a woman came up behind him.

"Excuse me? I'm looking for my boyfriend."

He turned and she stared at him, hoping he would help. But he didn't remember anything about her and in a deeper voice said he'd seen no one. Then he walked away, not knowing to take his car. As he exited the garage and moved down the street, he felt a wallet against his thigh withdrew it. He looked at the face on the driver's license and felt nothing as he bellowed the wallet wide, took the cash and tossed it aside.

Then, feeling the morning sun on his new life, he walked on, good for another six months. ■

MATHESON

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

just survival of the spirit and nothing to worry about. But when it turns malevolent you feel instantly and deeply out of your element, plunged into a dark borealis not ruled by the same gravities our lives are. As if, on some level, you've entered an energy jungle and can't see through the vines.

"You consider your position and think, well, if it comes to it, I'll draw a pentagram on the floor with chalk, get in the middle, and wait out the storm. It doesn't work that way. And such thinking, though understandable, relies far too heavily on religious assumption. That good can defeat bad, if you know how to properly recruit it. Very parochial and not much use when the houses come to life. Even 'experts' in this field can't easily pretend to a knowledge and understanding of it—they simply don't know for sure because phenomena can't be replicated under lab conditions. And as far as scientists are concerned, it never happened to begin with. I guess I can't really blame them. It's sort of like that old joke, you know, 'I guess you had to be there'."

Of the many cases Matheson investigated with the department, the most notable was the house which ultimately served as the basis for Frank DeFelitta's novel and film, *The Entity*, in which a woman was repeatedly raped by three apparitions. "In the circle of professional parapsychologists, there are certain houses that become very hot, and well-known researchers in the field hear about such houses quickly. The house on which *The Entity* was based was such a house. Carlos Casteneda had come, Frank DeFelitta, the UCLA Parapsychology Department, and a number of journalists—it was a well covered house. We decided the best approach was to throw a séance in the bedroom of the woman who had claimed to be assaulted by these apparitions. We took light-impermeable cardboard—which is very, very thick—and covered all the windows and doors down to the base so no light could enter from the bottom. We attached it all with what's called 'gaffer's' tape—they use it in movies and in television, it's so strong that if you stuck a foot and a half of it to a beam, you could hang off of it—so there was no normal way this could come down. On one wall, we had written in phospherescent tape the words: *Yes*, *No*, and *Ask again*. We then brought in a couple of heavyweight



"We decided to throw a seance in the bedroom of the woman who'd claimed to be assaulted by these apparations."

PHOTO © 1981 PELLEPORT INVESTORS INC.

psychics and began the séance. This 'thing' began to flicker answers to our questions. And the answers became progressively disturbing. 'Are you going to hurt this woman?' *Yes*. 'Will you ever go away?' *No*. 'Do you want to kill her?' *Yes*. Things like that. So we took a break, went outside the room and closed the door. Nobody was allowed in. Suddenly, from within the room, we heard this tremendous *whooshing* sound. An implosion. Deafening. We couldn't get the bedroom door opened. When the door finally was forced open, we saw all the cards had been ripped down! The force to get those cards down would have to have been of gale strength," Matheson reflects, remembering. "It was a striking moment."

In addition to the employment of mediums, several other techniques are utilized while investigating paranormal activity, including the use of holographic, infrared, and highly light-sensitive photographic equipment. It was this method which also produced some chilling results at the Moran residence. "We began to use a Polaroid camera just to see if we would get anything," recalls Matheson, "when suddenly she pointed and said, 'There's one coming into the kitchen right now.' We took a Polaroid and got a picture of this *thing*—a seven foot man with a head like a bulldog. I saw nothing in the room at all, at the time. But this thing in the picture was horrific looking. I thought, maybe it's a telekinetic manipulation of the film itself within the camera. Maybe she was, in her mind, so absolutely convinced, she'd caused the film to register this vision. If so, imagine what she was seeing. The *horror*."

Matheson offers many such anecdotes, both frightening and fascinating. Stories of towels lighting on fire spontaneously, lamps turning on for no reason, and closet doors slamming shut by themselves, "which," he adds, referring to the latter, "really got to me because of the power involved."

One story concerned an apparition which responded to the music of rock group Black Sabbath, "which is interesting, given all the new stuff that's coming out about satanic lyrics," he says. "I watched the senate hearing recently about satanic influences in rock lyrics. And this 'thing' just *loved* the music of Black Sabbath. Odd isn't it?" He also relates the story of the first séance he attended, where a psychic presumably became the force that was torturing a family in a house outside of Los Angeles. "Our hands were linked, about eight of us. The medium was asking questions and suddenly laughed in this



"The house had become like an FM radio, sucking up the 1940s—clinking glasses, Gershwin piano, talk of the war . ."

basso voice. It was the first time I'd been in a room where a human went through a change like that, and a chill about sawed me in half. We held hands more tightly and I remember Thelma Moss saying, 'Well, that's a very nice voice. Where did you get that voice?' I thought, okay, so this is how you do it, a *dialogue*. You try to create an exchange between the psychic and the "force." Communicate with it. The idea isn't just to incite a pyrotechnic display, have it scare you, and run away. The idea is to *reason* with it. Find out what it wants. See if you can't request it to leave. Or, saying that, *demand* that it leave. Tell it it doesn't belong. 'I want you to leave these people alone,' Moss would say. 'You're not welcome here. You're making everybody *very* unhappy.' Those kinds of conversations. As if she were berating a troublesome child. In some cases, the entity would leave. In others, not."

But Matheson makes it clear he didn't joint the department strictly for the purpose of collecting anecdotal material for this script; nor was it to experience the exhilaration of a "pyrotechnic display"—although he asks, "Who isn't fascinated at a séance? Who has not, at a party, said, 'Gee, let's try a séance?' But such entertainments are to be avoided," he notes. "They can open doors to places you don't want to be."

His time at UCLA also increased his interest in psychology, his second career choice, through 'seeing the ramifications of unstable thinking and what people did to rationalize it." He explains: "People would come in and tell us there were Viet Cong irregulars up in the attic . . . or towels leaping off racks, trying to strangle them. It wasn't because any of this stuff was happening. They were ill; deeply troubled. It furthered my sympathy for people. Heightened my respect for the mind. It's prisms."

Would he do it again?

"I don't know," Matheson says. "You see, the more you find out about alternative realities, the more you conclude you are probably best to stay away. I'm glad I went through it; it settled many questions, ideas. It fascinates me, but it's better for me to experience it from a distance; I'm not the guy who'd spend a week in the Amityville houses—unless the Green Berets were having a jamboree on the front lawn." ■

PHOTO © 1982 MGM



NOT WITH A WHIMPER

No matter which road Jack traveled through time, the end was always the same.

JOHN SKIPP
CRAIG SPECTOR

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID DIRCKS

This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

—T S Eliot, "The Hollow Men"

LAST NIGHT JACK FITZpatrick committed suicide by attacking the President of the United States with a fully charged cream pie. Lemon meringue, in honor of the occasion—history rewritten in an explosion of frothy yellow goo. He did not pull back, as I might have expected—as he had so many times before. He didn't even pull back *after* the fact: retracing the move, chalking it up to youthful folly and wiping it forever from the face of Time.

No, this time Jack stayed to the bitter end. Through the nine-millimeter staccato death-dance that accompanied the Secret Servicemen's gunfire, and beyond. He jerked off the platform like a marionette with its cables cut, toppling backward through the bunting and into the Hereafter. The media swarmed instantly around his ruined form, a jumble of lenses and shutters providing state-of-the-art coverage far superior to what Hinckley or Oswald or Sirhan Sirhan had received. Millions of Americans watched in slack-jawed silence as Jack Fitzpatrick's radiant nightmare visage stared into their living rooms and straight through the veil, grinning through the blood.

And when I turned, half-hoping to find him miraculously beside me, popping the tab on another brew as he played back yet another videotape of Something That Never Really Happened, laughing and toasting humanity for the wonderfully gullible bunch of patsies we were and still remain—he was simply not there.

Nor has he appeared, in the ticking hours since. No, this time Jack Fitzpatrick—my friend, the Man Who Could Do Anything—remained in his awkward spread-eagle by the podium steps, lifeblood seeping from the dozens of holes that the Presidents men had expertly opened in him. He died—no, he *let* himself die, right there, his body, blown to bits. His mouth, still smiling.

A lot of people have been wondering about that smile. Now, I guess, it's time to tell someone about it.

Jack and I were buddies, we even worked together, a few years back. At the time, we were both poor young struggling nobodies. I was caught up in the desperate struggle to get published, often to the point of forsaking the compassion that spurred me to write in the first place. And Jack—well, Jack was strange.

WHIMPER

He was a gentle soul, kamikaze cream pies notwithstanding. He genuinely gave a damn: about people, about the world, about the details you and me and the rest of the scuffling horde nosing the grindstone to get-us-this-our-daily-bread never even stop to think about. Maybe he cared too much, I don't know. Despite our friendship, Jack was a loner. There was always this impenetrable wall of self-sufficiency that he never let slip. Jack Fitzpatrick took care of himself . . . even if that ultimately came to mean wiping that self clear off the face of the Earth, erasing all traces, wrapping all loose ends, and letting everyone involved go on with their lives, unencumbered by the tiniest scintilla of knowledge regarding a Mr. Jacob B. Fitzpatrick—regardless of how intimately he had known them in any reality.

Sounds weird? Sure it does. It can't be helped. I am proud to be the bearer of this lunacy, just as I am proud to have been his friend throughout, knowing as I now do that he could have wiped himself out of my existence at the drop of a hat. He didn't, though, and I love him for that.

So you'll understand if I'm biased in this account. If you want bum raps, read the funny papers. File under the Freedom of Information Act, if you're really that ambitious, find out what miserable distortions they will inevitably concoct. It should be enlightening. The Government is adept at disappearing anything they cannot readily explain. And the Press loves nothing better than to take things out of context, to rearrange them in a form that suits their needs. They do it all the time. They're good at it.

But not nearly as good as Jack. Believe me.

I THINK HE FIRST DISCOVERED IT WHEN HE was about twenty-seven. Now, that might seem a long time to wait to find one's gift, one's destiny; but in the scheme of things, it's nothing. Certainly in *Jack's* scheme of things, it was nothing. He must have logged in a good ten thousand years before the bullets splattered and snuffed him out at the ripe old age of twenty-nine.

John Skipp and Craig Spector, authors of The Light at the End *and* The Cleanup, *have recently completed their third novel,* The Scream, *which will be published by Bantam Books in January.*

It began, as I recall, with a girl named Jamie Morgenstern, whom Jack hoped to date and eventually fuck the bejesus out of. She was a receptionist for Whitley, Greene, and Pimkin, a posh Madison Avenue consulting firm, one of our largest clients. She was also stunning in the extreme: chestnut hair, emerald green eyes, lips to die for, and a body whose upper and lower hemispheres seemed to be perpetually competing for perfection. I mean, this girl could stop traffic if she was wrapped in *burlap*, though her customary office attire tended toward curve-hugging silk blouses and skirts that made me dream of dying and being reincarnated as her seat cushion.

I estimate he must have logged in a good ten thousand years before the bullets splattered and snuffed him out at the ripe old age of twenty-nine.

Jack was slightly more ambitious. Nothing new there: he always did aim a little higher than me, though both of us were more driven than the vast bulk of our coworkers. We were messengers by day, crazed cyclists for an outfit called *Speed Demons, Inc.* In most people's eyes, we were nothing but proles: shitstoters and delivery boys, the feebs and dweebs that made sure that flak men got their flak distributed and lawyers got their lawsuits filed by five o'clock, when all bells ring in midtown and the young turks break for the Tex-Mex fern bars.

Of course, in most cases they were right. I only ever met two types during my stint on the streets: those on their way up, and those on their way down. Most fell firmly into the latter category, destined to shuffle along with their bags of broken dreams until old age finally coughed up its payload of fixed income and Little Friskies. The fear of failure was a palpable thing. But the rest of us kept up the good fight, certain in the desperate determination of our dreams. And I guess we were right. I went on to become a published writer, and Jack . . .

But we were talking about Jamie Morgenstern, who was gorgeous beyond belief. Jack hungered for her with a fervor that would have made Jason—hands inches from the Golden Fleece—tremble with inferiority of purpose. Seismographic disturbances were reported if he so much as thought of her. To me, it was a pointless obsession because midtown receptionists occupied a pinnacle so far above lowly messengers that they would have to stoop clear through the ozone layer just to recognize our faces above the clipboards we daily held out for their immaculately illegible signatures.

This was clear to me and the rest of the civilized world. But it didn't mean squat to Jack Fitzpatrick, who was so rakish and recklessly canny that Jamie Morgenstern didn't report him the first time he propositioned her. Nor did she discourage him on the second attempt. Nor on the third.

I remember the day I spotted him barreling the wrong way down Forty-Seventh Street and skidding onto Third Avenue, where I'd just emerged from what may be the only skyscraper in the Free World that features a life-sized, clinically accurate bronze nude permamounted in its revolving door. When he saw me he careened across the oncoming traffic and dismounted at a dead run. "Ohmigod ohmigod, I can't fucking be-*lieve* it! I done died and gone to Hebben!"

I had a sick feeling inside. Only one thing could get a rise like that out of Jack Fitzpatrick, and I wasn't entirely sure that I wanted my intuition verified.

"So, Chuckles," I tried to be nonchalant. "What's the deal?"

'She said *YES!*" he blurted. 'She said YES! To*night*! Din*ner*! Dan*cing*! *Fore*play!" He was jumping up and down and shaking me by now, all blond-haired blue-eyed handsomeness disassembled. "Man, his is a *goddess*. I'm going out with! This is fucking Venus herself!"

"What, no arms or head?"

He ignored me. "Oh, God, I can't believe it! I'm gonna die!" He twirled and feigned a heart attack, falling back into what he trusted would be my waiting arms.

Maybe I should have let him fall, but I didn't. I had seen guys lose their cookies over affairs with the opposite camp before, but nothing like this. This was storm troopers taking over the Vatican. This was *intense*. I figured there must be some kind of catch he wasn't hip to, and I felt morally compelled to blunt the edge of his fervor. So I said to him, by way of artful deflation, "Look,

Jack. Something's wrong here. The chick has AIDS or herpes or something. That's all she wrote, man. You'll jump into the sack with her, and you'll end up toting around these little fungoids for the rest of your days. So what the hell are you so worked up about, anyway? So *what* if she's beautiful! A legacy of genital leprosy is worth all this pre-coital leaping about?"

I was only teasing, trying to keep him from being too smug in the face of the fact that though we'd both always lusted for her, he'd been the one who ultimately scored. Nothing new there. We always lusted for the same women. He always got them. I always teased him.

But I wasn't always right . . .

Jack and Jamie in fact *did* go out, and had a spectacular dinner together, scarfing steak and seafood at Dobson's, engaging in the kind of high-octane conversation that always got a little weird for Jack when he tried too hard. But it worked: he finally charmed her back to her apartment with a grace and economy of motion that you never see in the *How To Pick Up Girls! Girls! Girls!* ads. They made the kind of love that conjurs up the theme music to *National Geographic* specials, all tongues and teeth and sweet soul-fire. To hear Jack tell it, mountains were reshaping themselves on the other side of the planet.

And then, in the sweet, sweet afterglow, when all was perfection, she started to cry. He asked what was wrong, and she told him, and my future as the Amazing Kreskin was assured: she was so sorry, but she couldn't help herself, it had been so long since she'd dared even risk it, but she just couldn't hold back anymore, and she really liked him, and it *wasn't* under control at all, and she was so sorry . . .

. . . and Jack had felt the bottom drop out of the pit of his stomach, and he lost it thinking oh shit, oh shit, I wish this had never even happened *and a blinding pressure like an embolism imploding bloomed in his head . . .*

. . . and suddenly they were back at Dobson's, finishing their coffee, and he was saying, "and that's why we just can't go to bed together, Jamie." She gazed at him with a strange mixture of shock, confusion, sorrow, and relief. And, all in a flash, he realized what had happened.

Of course, he walked her home, and they wound up not going to bed with each other. Jack always spoke wistfully of it. "Getting herpes was a lot more fun than *not* getting herpes," he said. "In the short run, anyways." He grinned thoughtfully and added, "But at least I got to do it, didn't I?"

I know what you're thinking. I know, because when he finished telling *me* I started checking his bike helmet for bumper dents. Brain damage would have explained everything to *my* satisfaction. But he was clean, and the fact that he was so adamant left me no conclusion but that my best friend had come completely unhinged. She'd shot him down, and he'd been driven bonkers by his own rabid libido. He smiled the smile of the perfectly just. I began to worry.

It was quite some time before we spoke of it again. That came much



later. After the change.

After the proof.

IN THE FIRST FEW MONTHS OF HIS STRANGE new life, going strictly by the purely linear time-sense the rest of us are bound to, Jack Fitzpatrick spent the majority of his new-found extra time screwing around. He slept with well over a thousand different women. And I do mean different, *every conceivable combination and configuration of comely female flesh that a loving Creator had seen fit to bless humanity with ultimately yielded to the carnal colonialism of Jack Fitzpatrick. From tall, leggy blondes with faces of sculpted alabaster and breasts like ripe mangos to tiny, dark-haired, smokey-eyed girls whose deeply banked fires went unnoticed by all but the most perceptive gaze. All races, all ages. All types of women knew his touch. And none of them ever remembered exactly what had left them smiling so sublimely.*

He also saw every film that rolled through Times Square, every play on Broadway, every performance at Lincoln Center, and read every book, every periodical and every newspaper he wanted in Barnes & Noble, B. Dalton, and the entire New York Public Library system. He ate in the best restaurants in every borough, and tipped generously. He saw the World Series, took every course offered by the Discovery Center and the Learning Annex, and sat through all three of David Bowie's world tour shows at Madison Square Garden three times each.

He also learned very quickly not to talk with anyone about it—with anyone but me, anyway. That was not so good for me, but very wise for him. Opting to not enlighten the general populace spared him the likelihood of an involuntary holiday at Bellevue, with his ass-end hanging out of a paper smock.

But most of all, it allowed him to get his earthy rocks off. He had more fun in those first few months than most people have in their whole family tree. He sowed more wild oats than the Harvest Queen herself. It was great therapy, he worked off a lifetime of vicarious thrills and pointless liaisons. He must have picked up a good seven years in stolen moments—a nonstop, two thousand, five hundred and fifty-five day party weekend—all in the space of six months, all without aging one crinkle.

By now you are either dying to know how he did this or you're busy speed-dialing the bozophone. In the too-few hours since Jack's death I've been searching for, among other things, clues as to *how* he could do whatever it is that he did. I wish I could tell you I've been successful. As near as I can tell, it was just a wild talent, a gift, if you will—a sort of mental "squeeze" as he called it. Some lamebrained group of researchers a couple of years from now are going to explain this as an acronym for *Synchronistic Quantum Universal Energy Enveloping Zeitgeist-Entropy* and receive a huge grant to investigate its military applications. Jerkoffs. As near as I can tell Jack called it a "squeeze" 'cause that's how it *felt* while it was happening. Maybe he squeezed his pineal gland. You tell me.

His technique, as far as I can tell, was ridiculously simple:

1) Roll with the flow of linear time for as long as required to do what is desired,

2) "Squeeze" back in time to the moment *before* said event occurs, and,

3) Do something else.

Simple, huh? Sure. And all you need to do to play the flute is 1) blow into the big hole, and 2) move your fingers up and down on all the little ones. But that was Jack's style. Anyway, us-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 75

A TZ TWILIGHT ZONE FIRST PUBLICATION

PRINCE OF FLOWERS

From the museum's dusty corridors an ancient power called her to its worship.

ELIZABETH HAND

ILLUSTRATION BY FRANCES JETTER



HELEN'S FIRST ASSIGNMENT on the inventory project was to the Department of Worms. For two weeks she paced the narrow alleys between immense tiers of glass cabinets, opening endless drawers of freeze-dried invertebrates and tagging each with an acquisition number. Occasionally she glimpsed other figures, drab as herself in government issue smocks, gray shadows stalking through the murky corridors. They waved at her but seldom spoke, except to ask directions; everyone got lost in the Museum.

Helen loved the hours lost in wandering the labyrinth of storage rooms, research labs, chilly vaults crammed with effigies of Yanomano Indians and stuffed jaguars. Soon she could identify each department by its smell: acrid dust from the feathered pelts in ornithology; the cloying reek of fenugreek and syrup in Mammalogy's roach traps; fish and formaldehyde in Ichthyology. Her favorite was Paleontology, an annex where the air smelled damp and clean, as though beneath the marble floors trickled hidden water, undiscovered caves, mammoth bones to match those stored above. When her two weeks in Worms ended she was sent to Paleo, where she delighted in the skeletons strewn atop cabinets like forgotten toys, disembodied skulls glaring from behind wastebaskets and bookshelves. She found a *fabrosaurus ischium* wrapped in brown paper and labeled in crayon, beside it a huge hand-hewn crate dated 1886 and marked WYOMING MEGOSAUR. It had never been opened. Some mornings she sat with a small mound of fossils before her, fitting the pieces together with the aid of a Victorian monograph. Hours passed in total silence, weeks when she saw only three or four people, curators slouching in and out of their research cubicles. On Fridays, when she dropped off her inventory sheets, they smiled. Occasionally even remembered her name. But mostly she was left alone, sorting cartons of bone and shale, prying apart frail skeletons of extinct fish as though they were stacks of newsprint.

Once, almost without thinking, she slipped a fossil fish into the pocket of her smock. The fossil was the length of her hand, as perfectly formed as a fresh beech leaf. All day she fingered it, tracing the imprint of bone and scale. In the bathroom later she wrapped it in paper towels and hid it in her purse to bring home. After that she started taking things

FLOWERS

At a downtown hobby shop she bought little brass and lucite stands to display them in her apartment. No one else ever saw them. She simply liked to look at them alone.

Her next transfer was to Mineralogy, where she counted misshapen meteorites and uncut gems. Gems bored her, although she took a chunk of petrified wood and a handful of unpolished amethysts and put them in her bathroom. A month later she was permanently assigned to Anthropology.

The Anthropology Department was in the most remote corner of the Museum, its proximity to the boiler room made it warmer than the Natural Sciences wing, the air redolent of spice woods and exotic unguents used to polish arrowheads and axe-shafts. The ceiling reared so high overhead that the rickety lamps swayed slightly in drafts that Helen longed to feel. The constant subtle motion of the lamps sent flickering waves of light across the floor. Raised arms of Balinese statues seemed to undulate, and points of light winked behind the empty eyeholes of feathered masks.

Everywhere loomed shelves stacked with smooth ivory and gaudily beaded bracelets and neck-rings. Helen crouched in corners loading her arms with bangles until her wrists ached from their weight. She unearthed dusty lurid figures of temple demons and cleaned them, polished hollow cheeks and lapis eyes before stapling a number to each figure. A corner piled with tipi poles hid an abandoned desk that she claimed and decorated with mummy photographs and a ceramic coffee mug. In the top drawer she stored her cassette tapes and, beneath her handbag, a number of obsidian arrowheads. While it was never officially designated as her desk, she was annoyed one morning to find a young man tilted backward in the chair, shuffling through her tapes.

"Hello," he greeted her cheerfully. Helen winced and nodded coolly. "These your tapes? I'll borrow this one someday, haven't got the album yet. Leo Bryant—"

"Helen," she replied bluntly. "I think there's an empty desk down by the slit-gongs."

"Thanks, I just started. You a curator?"

Helen shook her head, rearranging the cassettes on the desk. "No. Inventory project." Pointedly she moved his knapsack to the floor.

"Me too. Maybe we can work together sometime."

She glanced at his earnest face and smiled. "I like to work alone, thanks." He looked hurt, and she added, "Nothing personal—I just like it that way. I'm sure we'll run into each other. Nice to meet you, Leo." She grabbed a stack of inventory sheets and walked away down the corridor.

They met for coffee one morning. After a few weeks they met almost every morning, sometimes even for lunch outside on the Mall. During the day Leo wandered over from his cubicle in Ethnology to pass on departmental gossip. Sometimes they had a drink after work, but never often enough to invite gossip themselves. Helen was happy with this arrangement, the curators delighted to have such a worker—quiet, without ambition, punctual. Everyone except Leo left her to herself.

It was a puppet: not a toy, but a gorgeously costumed figure that gazed scornfully down at Helen, its face glinting with gilt paint.

Late one afternoon Helen turned at the wrong corner and found herself in a small cul-de-sac between stacks of crates that cut off light and air. She yawned, breathing the faint must of cinnamon bark as she traced her path on a crumpled inventory map. This narrow alley was unmarked; the adjoining corridors contained Malaysian artifacts, batik tools, long teak boxes of gongs. Fallen crates, clumsily hewn cartons overflowing with straw were scattered on the floor. Splintered panels snagged her sleeves as she edged her way down the aisle. A sweet musk hung about these cartons, the languorous essence of unknown blossoms.

At the end of the cul-de-sac an entire row of crates had toppled, as though the weight of time had finally pitched them to the floor. Helen squatted and chose a box at random, a broad flat package like a portfolio. She pried the lid off to find a stack of leather cutouts curling with age, like dessicated cloth. She drew one carefully from the pile, frowning as its edges disintegrated at her touch. A shadow puppet, so fantastically elaborate that she couldn't tell if it was male or female, it scarcely looked human. Light glimmered through the grotesque latticework as Helen jerked it back and forth, its pale shadow dancing across the wall. Then the puppet split and crumbled into brittle curlicues that formed strange heiroglyphics on the black marble floor. Swearing softly, Helen replaced the lid, then jammed the box back into the shadows. Her fingers brushed another crate, of smooth polished mahogany. It had a comfortable heft as she pulled it into her lap. Each corner of the narrow lid was fixed with a large, square-headed nail. Helen yanked these out and set each upright in a row.

As she opened the box, dried flowers, seeds, and wood shavings cascaded into her lap. She inhaled, closing her eyes, and imagined blue water and firelight, sweet-smelling seeds exploding in the embers. She sneezed and opened her eyes to a cloud of dust wafting from the crate like smoke. Very carefully she worked her fingers into the fragrant excelsior, kneading the petals gently until she grasped something brittle and solid. She drew this out in a flurry of dead flowers.

It was a puppet: not a toy, but a gorgeously costumed figure, spindly arms clattering with glass and bone circlets, batik robes heavy with embroidery and beadwork. Long whittled pegs formed its torso and arms and the rods that swiveled it back and forth, so that its robes rippled tremulously, like a swallowtail's wings. Held at arm's length it gazed scornfully down at Helen, its face glinting with gilt paint. Sinuous vines twisted around each jointed arm. Flowers glowed within the rich threads of its robe, orchids blossoming in the folds of indigo cloth.

Loveliest of all was its face, the curve of cheeks and chin so gracefully arched it might have been cast in gold rather than coaxed from wood. Helen brushed it with a finger: the glossy white paint gleamed as though still wet. She touched the carmine bow that formed its mouth, traced the jet-black lashes stippled across its brow, like a regiment of ants. The smooth wood felt warm to her touch as she stroked it with her fingertips. A courtesan might have perfected its sphinx's smile; but in the tide of petals Helen discovered a

slip of paper covered with spidery characters. Beneath the straggling script another hand had shaped clumsy block letters spelling out the name *PRINCE OF FLOWERS*.

Once, perhaps, an imperial concubine had entertained herself with its fey posturing, and so passed the wet silences of a long green season. For the rest of the afternoon it was Helen's toy. She posed it and sent its robes dancing in the twilit room, the frail arms and tiny wrists twitching in a marionette's waltz.

Behind her a voice called, "Helen?"

"Leo," she murmured. "Look what I found."

He hunched beside her to peer at the figure. "Beautiful. Is that what you're on now? Balinese artifacts?"

She shrugged. "Is that what it is? I didn't know." She glanced down the dark rows of cabinets and sighed. "I probably shouldn't be here. It's just so hot—" She stretched and yawned as Leo slid the puppet from her hands.

"Can I see it?" He twisted it until its head spun and the stiff arms flittered. "Wild. Like one of those dancers in *The King and I*." He played with it absently, hypnotized by the swirling robes. When he stopped, the puppet jerked abruptly upright, its blank eyes staring at Helen.

"Be careful," she warned, kneading her smock between her thumbs. "It's got to be a hundred years old." She held out her hands and Leo returned it, bemused.

"It's wild, whatever it is." He stood and stretched. "I'm going to get a soda. Want to come?"

"I better get back to what I was working on. I'm supposed to finish the Burmese section this week." Casually she set the puppet in its box, brushed the dried flowers from her lap and stood.

"Sure you don't want a soda or something?" Leo hedged plaintively, snapping his ID badge against his chest. "You said you were hot."

"No thanks," Helen smiled wanly. "I'll take a raincheck. Tomorrow."

Peeved, Leo muttered and stalked off. When his silhouette faded away she turned and quickly pulled the box into a dim corner. There she emptied her handbag and arranged the puppet at its bottom, wrapping Kleenex about its arms and face. Hairbrush, wallet, lipstick: all thrown back into her purse, hiding the puppet beneath their clutter. She repacked the crate with its sad array of blossoms, hammering the lid back with her shoe. Then she scrabbled in the corner on her knees until she located a space between stacks of cartons. With a resounding crack the empty box struck the wall, and Helen grinned as she kicked more boxes to fill the gap. Years from now another inventory technician would discover it and wonder, as she had countless times, what had once been inside the empty carton.

When she crowded into the elevator that afternoon the leather handle of her purse stuck to her palm like wet rope. She shifted the bag casually as more people stepped on at each floor, heart pounding as she called goodbye to the curator for Indo-Asian Studies passing in the lobby. Imaginary prison gates loomed and crumbled behind Helen as she strode through the columned doors and into the summer street.



All the way home she smiled triumphantly, clutching her handbag to her chest. As she fumbled at the front door for her keys a fresh burst of scent rose from the recesses of her purse. Inside, another scent overpowered this faint perfume—the thick reek of creosote, rotting fruit, unwashed clothes. Musty and hot and dark as the Museum's dreariest basement, the only two windows faced onto the street. Traffic ground past, piping bluish exhaust through the screens. A grimy mirror reflected shabby chairs, an end table with lopsided lamp: furniture filched from college dormitories or reclaimed from the corner dumpster. No paintings graced the pocked walls, blotched with the crushed remains of roaches and silverfish.

But beautiful things shone here, gleaming from windowsills and cracked formica counters: the limp frond of a fossil fern, etched in obsidian glossy as wet tar, a whorled nautilus like a tiny whirlpool impaled upon a brass stand. In the center of a splintered coffee table was the imprint of a foot-long dragonfly's wing embedded in limestone, its filigreed scales a shattered prism.

Corners heaped with lemur skulls and slabs of petrified wood. The exquisite cone shells of poisonous mollusks. Mounds of green and golden irridescent beetles, like the coinage of a distant country. Patches of linoleum scattered with shark's teeth and arrowheads, a tiny skull anchoring a handful of emerald plumes that waved in the breeze like a sea-fan. Helen surveyed it all critically, noting with mild surprise a luminous pink geode: she'd forgotten that one. Then she set to work.

In a few minutes she'd removed everything from her bag and rolled the geode under a chair. She unwrapped the puppet on the table, peeling tissue from its brittle arms and finally twisting the long strand of white paper from its head, until she stood ankle-deep in a drift of tissue. The puppet's supporting rod slid neatly into the mouth of an empty beer bottle, and she arranged it so that the glass was hidden by its robes and the imperious face tilted upward, staring at the bug-flecked ceiling.

Helen squinted appraisingly, rearranged the feathers about the puppet, shoring them up with the carapaces of scarab beetles: still it looked all wrong. Beside the small proud figure, the fossils were muddy remains, the nautilus a bit of sea-wrack. A breeze shifted the puppet's robes, knocking the scarabs to the floor, and before she knew it Helen had crushed them, the little emerald shells splintering to gray dust beneath her heel. She sighed in exasperation: all her pretty things suddenly looked so mean. She moved the puppet to the windowsill, to another table, and finally into her bedroom. No corner of the flat could hold it without seeming even grimier than before. Helen swiped at cobwebs above the doorway before setting the puppet on her bedstand and collapsing with a sigh onto her mattress.

In the half-light of the windowless bedroom the figure was not so resplendent. Disappointed, Helen straightened its robes yet again. As she tugged the cloth into place, two violet petals, each the size of her pinky nail, slipped between her fingers. She rolled the tiny blossom between her palm, surprised at how damp and fresh they felt, how they breathed a scent like ozone, or seawater. Thoughtfully she rubbed the violets until only a gritty pellet remained between her fingers.

Flowers, she thought, and recalled the name on the paper she'd found. The haughty figure wanted flowers.

Grabbing her key and a rusty pair of scissors, she ran outside. Thirty minutes later she returned, laden with blos-

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A TZ TWILIGHT ZONE FIRST PUBLICATION

BLIMP HUNTER

Some collect stamps.
Some build ships in bottles.
Shelby's sport was stalking blimps.

J. NOYES SCHER

ILLUSTRATION BY KIM DREW

SHELBY HOLCOMB wasn't sure what it was about blimps that he hated. He wasn't even sure he hated them. It was just that hunting them seemed to satisfy some sort of primal urge. Like a sport or hobby, it was an activity to lose himself in, an escape from the pressures of the day-to-day, considerable as they were in a city the scale of Manhattan.

Sure, some people build ships in bottles, some collect stamps, but Shelby was most content seated atop the roof of the forty-story clocktower in Tribeca, a six-pack at his side and his rifle in his lap.

He used a .22 with the rationalization that the tiny bullets didn't make much more than pigeon-peck-sized holes in the blimps, and he never aimed at the manned gondola that hung from the blimp's belly. He had nothing against the pilots or crews, if anything he envied their view. He might have made a case for shooting at the advertisements that blinked across the blimps, but it wouldn't have explained anything. It was really just sport. Something to shoot at that didn't shoot back. Something to do at night outdoors in the city that didn't cost an arm and a leg. He would have felt bad if he'd ever actually shot one down. For starters, it would have meant the end of his hobby.

People who lived out in the country had it made, he thought. They could shoot as much as they liked and not have to worry about hitting anyone. But in a city crammed with eight million people, there was only one direction to shoot with any degree of safety, and that direction was up.

When Shelby first moved to the city he'd tried shooting at rats in the park at night, but the rifle was too big to conceal, and handguns didn't have the same appeal. He'd thought about pigeons, but they weren't good sport and tended to roost in places he didn't dare risk shooting at, like window sills. Blimps, on the other hand, were perfect. He could aim for the bulbs that lit up their sides as they spelled out the various ads and greetings. It was difficult to hit them, and it was difficult to tell when he'd hit them, as the words danced across the blimp, blinking from one row of bulbs to the next. But it didn't matter. It was the hunt itself that gratified.

AND SO IT WAS, ONE HOT FRIDAY NIGHT in July, that Shelby climbed out of the trap door and onto the clocktower roof. Off on the Jersey side of the island the sun was setting with atomic colors, while on the East side above him, the sky was a deep blue. Stars were just visible and a slight breeze up on the tower made it almost chilly. Shelby was glad he'd worn his hunting jacket.

He walked to the edge of the building and sat down between the large roof ornaments in front of the big clock. He cracked the pop-top on a Rolling Rock and scanned the sky.

There were two blimps out that night. One drifted off Battery Park, probably over the Statue of Liberty; the other was up around midtown. Shelby was prepared to lie in wait like any hunter of big game. Sooner or later a blimp would float past—they almost always did. And when one did, he'd be ready.

Shelby let his thoughts drift unfettered. Images came to mind. He saw his mother bending over an open oven, and laughed to himself. It was a funny way to think of her, as she almost never cooked. Then he recalled Jack Achstinger, his antagonistic, rotund boss at the bakery. There was a lot of blimp in him,

BLIMP

he thought.

To erase these relatively unpleasant images from his mind, he did what he often did. He put women he'd glimpsed in the streets into the roles of women in various religious films he'd seen, and played his favorite scenes over and over in his mind, making little improvements, and imagining what kind of shoes they would wear.

Shelby dissolved from his fantasies back to the skyline. The downtown blimp was slowly making its way uptown. An errant breeze carried the whirring drone of the blimp motors to him.

Shelby felt his adrenaline rise as he put his beer aside and grabbed his rifle. He hugged the wooden butt-stock to his cheek and inhaled the sweet scent of the lemon oil polish. He watched through the telescopic sight as the big gas bag cleared the Woolworth Building and drifted toward him. He held his breath and squeezed off one shot. *Pop!* Off it flew! He ejected the shell, focused his being through the sight and fired again.

He fired a half dozen shots, lost in his task. The blimp had never come this close to the clocktower before. He could see the sign lamps clearly, and he picked off one after another. As the blimp drew nearer still, he could almost hear the pop of the bulbs. The blimp motors were now clearly audible, and growing louder as Shelby continued to shoot.

Slowly the bulbs on the blimp grew in size till they filled the circle in Shelby's telescopic sight. It was only then that Shelby looked up with his naked eye, astonished to see just how close the blimp had come.

Shelby put his rifle down. Hell, he thought, it almost isn't fair to shoot when it's this close. He felt suddenly exposed as the blimp came around to face him. The lights in the gondola seemed to glare at him like big, unblinking, angry eyes. It was so close now that he could clearly make out the mooring line and the black ribbing of the nose cone battons, and yet it was still coming!

They'd better pull up or turn off, he said to himself, or they're going to hit something. But on it came, and Shelby suddenly panicked. He put his rifle aside and gasped. It was coming right at him, and it somehow seemed *angry*.

Shelby lept to his feet and turned to beat a hasty retreat . . . Only to discover that the second blimp had snuck up behind and was now hovering, huge with menace, its motors growling, filling the entire northern skyline with its huge mass . . .

Shelby threw himself at the trap door in the roof and yanked it open. He lept in just as the first blimp roared overhead. He clambered down the rungs of the ladder, closed the trap door and tried to catch his breath.

He listened for the blimps over the ticking of the big antique clock. When his heart slowed down to normal, he realized he'd left his rifle on the roof. He debated the wisdom of retrieving it, and found himself laughing. It was absurd. Just some freak winds no doubt.

He felt suddenly exposed as the blimp came around to face him. The lights in the gondola seemed to glare at him like big angry eyes.

They weren't wild beasts, they were *blimps*.

He went back up the ladder and opened the trap door. Cautiously, he stuck his head out. When he saw both blimps laying in wait for him, he changed his mind and shut the trap door quickly. To hell with the rifle, he thought, they *were* angry.

Shelby descended the ladder to the top of the circular stairwell that ran down the inside of the clocktower. Through the tall dirty windows he could see the blimps. They were circling the building like gigantic sharks. They were after him.

Shelby took the elevator down to the ground floor and made for the Broadway exit. He left the building quickly and walked four blocks north before he dared look up. Sure enough, the two blimps were still circling the clocktower.

Shelby laughed. They might be big, and they might be mean, but they sure were stupid, he thought. He turned and walked off down the block, unaware that the two blimps had left the building, and were now motoring slowly after him. ■

666

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27

He cleared his throat. "Six-six-six."

"I'll need a credit card," she said without missing a beat.

"I don't want to talk to a girl," he said. "I'm not calling for that."

"We have lots of different services," she said. "Whatever you—"

"Six-six-six. That's the one."

"First your credit card number."

"Can't you just put me through? It's an extension, right? I only want to ask—"

"We accept Visa, Master, or American Express."

Reluctantly he got out his wallet. He read her the number and the expiration date.

"Name?"

"Why?"

"The name on the card."

He told her. "Now can I talk to—?"

"One moment, please."

The line went dead as he was placed on hold. Then music from a pop station was piped in.

What is it? he thought, some kind of murder-by-telephone scheme? You call up—or they call you—and they tell you who to hit, and then charge you for the service? Or do you charge them? Or you tell them and they have it done for you? By nervous men? Women in jeans? That's crazy.

But the address in the paper last night. It *was* the same street and house number he had heard when he picked up the phone. The call that had been intended for someone else.

The killer?

He looked around. He was still alone. The lunch crowd had not yet descended on the park. From the direction of the lake he now heard the roar of a generator. Dredging, he thought. The sound grew so loud it became difficult to hear the music. He considered hanging up.

The music stopped.

"Hi! My name's Brandy. What should I call you?"

"It doesn't matter," he said.

"Why don't you share your fantasy with me? And then I'll tell you mine.""

"No, thanks." He felt absurd. "I'm sure you're a very nice girl, uh, Brandy, but—"

"Oh, I am! But I can be very, very naughty sometimes. In fact, I *like* being naughty. I *love* going around the world for a hole-in-one, sixty-nine . . ."

"What about six-six-six?" he asked.

There was a pause. "That must be a new one. Sounds exciting."

"It's not new," he said. "You did it

for a friend of mine yesterday."

"I don't think that was me. What your friend's name?"

He didn't know what to say to that. "What about the women who called a few minutes ago?"

"You mean you want to talk to a *man*?" Her voice fell. "Just a minute and I'll connect you with—"

"No. I mean, it's not for me. I mean—"

"Do you want to talk to someone or not?'

"I want to talk to six-six-six."

Another pause. "Have you called before?' she said suspiciously.

"Maybe. I want to hear about your special service. The really special one. You know what I'm talking about.'

"Special services can cost a lot of money.'

"How about some information?"

"That costs, too."

"Go ahead. How much are you charging me right now, for instance?'

"Thirty-five. For ten minutes.'

"Okay." I can always stop payment later, he thought. An outfit like this wouldn't press it. Would they? "Add it on. Starting now."

"It could be a whole lot more. We'd have to do a credit check. Your friend who called. What's his name? Or did you say it was a she?"

"Yes. No. I mean, it wasn't exactly a friend. Look, I only want to know about—"

"I'm sorry, sir. We don't give out that kind of information. If you want something special you have to be recommended."

Click.

He stood there holding the phone, as the roar of the generator came closer. The branches surrounding the trail shook violently, as though a relentless and terrible presence were about to break through. Then the branches fell and a trimming truck rolled forward, chewing up foliage as it came. In an instant clear sky shone all around. He saw more trucks positioned throughout the park, their electric saws and leaf shredders whirring at the ready.

For a moment he was shocked, unable to move, his feet rooted to the earth. Then there was nothing but the white sky and the heat beating down.

He left the receiver dangling and made for the tunnel.

The roaring followed him. It was everywhere. He suctioned his hands over his ears and ran and did not slow till he came out on the street. A man with a gold tooth tried to hand him a discount flyer for an ethnic restaurant. He pulled away and hurried on, his ears pounding.

A line had formed in front of the movie theater. The crowd did not want to let him pass. He stumbled, his head lolling back, and saw the marquee.

GANGSTER GIRLS
SHAMBLERS
NO SURVIVORS

+4TH BIG HIT

He regained his balance, shoved through and staggered down the block to the crosswalk and his car.

He drove the back streets, trying to find a way out of the central city. He turned corner after corner, seeking a



route that was clear. Then the traffic thinned and he was idling at a familiar intersection. He told himself that he would be home soon, and finally he stopped shaking.

On his street, a moving van forced him to pull in between two parked cars until it squeezed past. The trimmers had ruthlessly topped every tree along the block; the great oaks were now dwarfs, with stubby trunks and pale limbs pointing like severed arms at the blinding eye of the sun. He stopped in his usual space, leaving his car dangerously exposed.

This was the culmination of a bad dream he had been lost in for longer than he could say. A few weeks or months ago, around the time of the last argument, he had made a wrong choice and nothing had been right since. If he could change the decision, get back on course, maybe his life would be good again. He would have to forget everything else. What had been happening wasn't real. It couldn't be.

Was this the way it was for her, too?

At last he understood how she felt.

I'll make it right, he thought. I did it before. I can do it again. Isn't that what she wants? I can't hide anymore. I know that now.

I'll call her.

I will.

Then he was inside the house, and he saw.

There was nothing left but a table and kitchen chair, empty bookcases, the telephone and answering machine, a few dishes, the bed, and his toilet articles in the bathroom. She had removed everything else of value. The furniture he had bought her. The stereo, the records. The pictures on the walls. Even the curtains she had made for the windows. All of it gone, stripped and loaded into the moving van while he was out.

He sat in the middle of the empty living room, on the hardwood floor, and waited to feel something somewhere in his body before the numbing chill crept up to his chest, where his heart was supposed to be.

THERE WERE NO MORE MESSAGES ON THE machine.

Without the television for the evening news he did not know whether the latest victim had been discovered yet. The newspaper was on the porch but he did not bother to get up. As to what would happen next, if someone was coming for him he or she was in no hurry. They had his address from the credit card if they wanted to track him down.

It was such a perfect plan. He had to admire it. He had not fully appreciated its prctical uses until now.

Had he?

He reached across the bare floor for the phone.

There were only two names and addresses he could think of to give them. One was the place where she was staying now.

He wondered if he had the courage to give them either.

But he did not have the ad. The only number he could remember was *666*.

He could go back and find the paper or one like it and make the call from there. He might even have the same quarter from the coin return still in his pocket. That would be right as rain. Then he could wait in the park, in the shelter of the tunnel, sleeping or not sleeping, until it rang again. He would be ready for the word they would give him, the word that would make it so much easier.

And then maybe, just maybe, someone would be able to tell him who to kill. ■

MOONLIGHT BECOMES MAGENTA

In the jungle the fire of revenge dies slowly . . . if it dies at all.

PAUL WITCOVER

ILLUSTRATION BY DENISE FAILEY



IN THOSE DAYS THE town lay halfway between the mountains and the jungle, a bastard claimed by neither parent. The only trail in or out cut over the highest peaks by a route murderous in the dry season and buried underneath mud or snow the rest of the year. Visitors were scarce, more like fleeting hallucinations than people such as ourselves—fugitives, holy men, and prospectors who descended out of the clouds and vanished forever into the green cauldron of hopes and dreams behind us, drunk on desire.

My father was the first to leave town and cross the mountains in more than a century. He ran off at the age of eighteen, a burning curiosity lighting his eyes, and returned ten years later, his eyes reduced to ash, hero of a revolution that had swept the country but left the town untouched. With him he brought his wife, a young girl from a seaside town who became like a sleepwalker at her first whiff of the steamy jungle air.

A year later I was stretching my mother's belly. My father had already forgotten the revolution, as if he had never left town. But over the mountains there were those who had reason to remember what he had been and fear what he might become again. One day the coffee pickers looked up to see a score of exhausted soldiers stumbling down the slopes. They conducted the soldiers to our door, carrying on as though Simon Bolívar himself was at their head.

The commanding officer, not Bolívar but a snot-nosed lieutenant who never identified himself by name, accused my father of assembling and training a guerrilla army in the depths of the jungle for the purpose of overthrowing the Republic in a broken voice that assaulted the ears like a weapon. The troopers held their rifles pointed negligently, as if by a coincidence that surprised even themselves, at my mother and grandfather. My father saw that he could not resist.

"Those are lies," he whispered for my grandfather's sake.

"There are no lies," the young lieutenant brashly informed him. "Only guilty and not-guilty."

After the arrest and execution, which took place in the capital five hundred miles away, my grandfather stopped eating. It shamed him to go on living without a chance of avenging his son, prevented not only by his advanced age but by the blindness that had darkened all his days. He took to his bed and remained there for months, not even rising to answer the calls of nature—a baby again at the age of eighty-three. Doctor Nuñez, our mayor (who had received his medical training from antiquated textbooks), advised my mother to expect the worst. A casket was ordered and Padre Mendez—an old crow in crumpled black cassock—summoned to administer the last rites.

It was in these funereal circumstances that I was born, a month premature. Doctor Nuñez pronounced me healthy, and my mother rejoiced at my manhood, rousing herself just long

MOONLIGHT

enough to announce that God had taken pity on her trials by sending a son. She named me Pablo, after my father (though, out of deference to his memory, I have always been called Pablito, right down to this day).

With my birth, my grandfather's appetite for life returned. He believed that the duty of avenging my father's death had settled upon my shoulders like a great cape at my first uncomprehending cry. It was big on me, though, and I needed his help to make sure I grew into it. Even before I could speak, when words were strange and wonderful sounds innocent of meaning, Grandfather was whispering the stern and implacable demands of revenge in my ear for bedtime stories. He raised me almost single-handedly—my mother was too deep in her murky widow's world to notice. I was to be his eyes and, when the time came, his hands.

TWO YEARS AFTER MY FATHER'S MURDER, the first in a series of details, each consisting of eleven men—ten soldiers and an officer—arrived to garrison the town. Although at first they took their duties seriously—drilling in the plaza each morning, marching up into the hills and making a start at pushing back the jungle where it was encroaching on the town—before long the muggy heat and monotonous way of life it spawned had wilted their enthusiasm. Once the first detail was relieved and able to spread the word, replacements began to arrive looking as though they'd been posted to the very ends of the earth. The duty came to be considered a black mark, a slap in the face. And after a while the army used it that way, sending soldiers not to police or even protect us but to punish them. Many deserted, disappearing into the jungle never to be seen again and heard from only in fantastic and improbable rumors that echoed the false charges against my father, rumors related to us by the more civilized Indians with whom we sometimes traded, of a tribe of cannibals led by white men who were carving an empire out of the deepest part of the jungle.

WHEN I WAS SEVEN, A DETAIL ARRIVED that was still awaiting relief five years later. Rather than desert and take their chances in the mountains or the jungle or continue to live apart as though posted in some isolated monastery, after a few years the soldiers married local girls and started families. The sole exception was Captain Ramiro Benitez, the commanding officer, a thin and stern-faced man who contracted malaria within a month of his arrival and spoke in a voice that made people wince and cover their ears.

Though the captain had changed drastically in the seven years he had been away, the first time Grandfather heard him open his mouth he knew him to be the same man who had arrested my father. Suddenly Grandfather had a focus for the stories he told me, and as a result I grew up impatient to avenge my father on Captain Ramiro Benitez before the malaria could beat me to it.

Some said the gypsies were witches, agents of the devil cloaked in human guise. Others maintained they were more interested in purses than souls.

I badgered Grandfather constantly for a chance. But he always shook his head, smiling at my eagerness. "Ever since you were born a month early nothing can happen fast enough to suit you! Revenge is a fruit that must be left to ripen. Besides, you're still too young."

The truth was that he was searching for some way to kill the captain that would satisfy all the demands of honor yet permit me to escape undetected—no easy trick in a town the size of ours, where people knew you were pissing before your water had a chance to hit the ground.

As the years passed, I began to worry that Grandfather might die before such an opportunity presented itself. After all, he was the oldest person in town—as Doctor Nuñez never tired of reminding him. More and more often, impatient and frustrated to the point of forgetting his own advice to me, he exploded in rages as blind as he was. Red-faced and shaking, unable to speak a word, he struck me with his open hand as if I were somehow to blame. The thought that one of these fits might induce a fatal heart attack was enough to make me tremble helplessly. But once he calmed down, Grandfather only laughed at my fears.

"There are two things keeping me alive," he told me once. "You know one of them."

"And the other?" I demanded.

"The gypsies. How could I go before thanking them for saving my life?"

The most eagerly awaited of all our rare visitors were the gypsies, who seldom made the arduous journey across the mountains more than once each century. Though there were hundreds of stories, no one really knew much about them. Some said they were witches, agents of the devil cloaked in human guise, while others maintained they were more interested in filching purses than souls. Because I believed every story no matter how contradictory and outlandish, the gypsies loomed large and vague in my eyes, juggling all opposites at once. They were especially venerated in my family because Grandfather had been born on the final day of their last visit.

It had been a difficult birth. He was dying, dragging his mother into the grave with him. The local midwives could do nothing. Finally an old gypsy, drawn by my great-grandmother's screams, had pulled Grandfather from the womb. The story goes that upon seeing he was blind, the gypsy blew sharply into each tiny ear as if honing the acuity of his hearing to a point where it would surpass the vision of the most far-sighted. And, in fact, Grandfather still claimed to have heard the fusillade that cut my father down all the years ago.

WHEN I WAS TWELVE, MY GRANDFATHER ninety-five, the gypsies returned. It was early afternoon and the streets were empty even of dogs, forced inside by the heat, people sat lazily behind open windows hoping for an errant mountain breeze or lay abed or in hammocks in a state of stupefaction that bordered on catatonia.

I was awakened that afternoon by my grandfather. Tears were streaming down his cheeks that he made no effort to brush away. I'd never seen him cry before and imagined something terrible must have happened. I sat up. "Grandfather, what is it? What's wrong?"

"Wrong? These are tears of joy, grandson. My prayers have been answered at last. Soon your father will be able to rest in peace his honor avenged, and we can hold our heads up high again."

My heart surged. "How? When?"

Paul Witcover's stories have appeared frequently in Night Cry *and other magazines. This is his first appearance in* The Twilight Zone.

"The gypsies are crossing the mountains. I hear them singing as they come, songs my heart remembers."

I strained my ears, hearing only the drone of jungle insects. But I never doubted Grandfather for an instant.

"They saved my life once," he continued, "and now they'll help me again. Go to them tonight, Pablito. Keep your eyes and ears open. Take note of everything."

I grabbed his hand, excited and afraid. "You've got to come with me, Grandfather!"

He shook his head. "It will be better if you come back and tell me what you've seen and heard. I'll know what's important."

A FEW HOURS LATER THE WHOLE TOWN knew about our visitors, and that night everyone turned out to watch the gypsy caravan parade singing through the street. It seemed as though the population had doubled in a flash. People were shouting and laughing, even more worked up than at Easter, when the street was paved with bright mosaics of flower petals and colored sand, a swirling carpet over which the holy relics of the church were carried by all the men in town. Now the men carried bottles of rum, their faces as splotchy in the pale radiance of the full moon as the face of the moon itself.

A great shout went up as the first wagons entered town, flanked by some gypsies on horseback. Everyone ran to greet them. It didn't seem possible that they could have brought so much across the mountains unless they truly were witches. They looked magical enough, with silver hoops dangling from the ears and noses of both men and women and bright scarves fluttering from all over their bodies. The sides of the wagons were painted like rainbows torn by arrows or feathers spilled in a war of jungle birds. Even their horses were like no animals we had ever seen—dark, spirited mounts with a dangerous and intelligent look that made me keep my distance until the surge of the crowd pulled me from my mother's side and pressed me up against a strong and sweaty flank.

The rider, an old, silver-haired gypsy who wore a long crimson robe that seemed to swallow light and exhale shadow, reached down to steady me. I clasped his hand, and when he pulled away a silver earring lay glittering in my palm. Without thinking, I quickly shut my fist and stuffed it into my pocket. When I looked up again, he was gone.

The gypsies drew their wagons into a loose circle about the plaza and unharnessed their horses to graze in a makeshift corral at the edge of the jungle. Flaps were raised, sideboards lowered, creating stages for the display of marvels. There were storytellers, mountebanks, and palmists, alchemists, astronomers, and astrologers. The smoky aroma of frying meat and vegetables filled the air as vendors invited passersby to sample food and hot spiced wine.

Soon I spotted the silver-haired gypsy again, his crimson cape like a fiery tongue in the torchlight. He had ten knives in the air at once, scrambling with hands, knees, and feet to keep them aloft. Just then, with all ten knives hanging at the apex of their orbits, the gypsy suddenly lowered his arms and walked to the



edge of the stage through a rain of steel, as unconcerned as a man caught in a cloudburst. Shouts rose on all sides, then a solemn hush followed by wild applause. More than one woman had fainted. I pushed to the front of the crowd.

The gypsy bowed, a gracious smile frozen on his face. "Thank you, friends. I am Cesar."

I saw that he was wearing a silver earring like the one he had given me and reached inside my pocket to touch it. I tried to catch his eye, but his gaze passed over everyone without distinction, never lingering.

"Friends! You've seen me juggle! How old am I?"

Shouts came from all around.

"Sixty!"

"No, seventy!"

"Seventy-five, right, Grandpa?"

Cesar just laughed, as though he had long ago despaired of ever hearing the right answer. "I am two hundred years old."

"Come on, Grandpa, that's impossible," someone called. "Don't think we're easy marks just because we live over the mountains."

"I agree it's impossible," Cesar said. "But it is the very nature of miracles to be impossible."

With that statement, he had us.

"Friends, ladies and gentlemen, behind me in this wagon waits my granddaughter, Magenta, herself well over one hundred. Soon she will dance for you, but first let me tell you of the miracle.

"Long ago, when Magenta was but a child, the Sainted Virgin appeared to her in a dream. In that dream the holy visage beamed down on her beatifically from heaven and spoke in a voice soft as moonlight.

" 'Magenta,' she said. 'Your purity of heart is so great that it gives you the power to purify others, but only in moonlight will this power be made manifest, for virginity in women is the seal of God's favor and the moon my own loving and vigilant eye.' "

As Cesar spoke, members of the crowd crossed themselves, chewing prayers past rubbery lips. Several old women swathed in black who wore about their thick necks yellowed rosaries that hung submerged within their bosoms like spiritual anchors, retrieved the beads and worried them from finger to finger.

"Friends!" thundered Cesar. "That same night the Holy Mother placed in my granddaughter's mind the steps to a holy dance, a dance to music our earthbound ears are incapable of hearing, the same music that pushes the planets through their orbits, the music of the angels. And simultaneously, in my mind, the secret of alchemy was revealed: the sweat of a young virgin blessed by God and kissed by moonlight, mixed with certain chemicals properly sanctified, yields a formula that will cure any ailment, grant absolution for any sin, and force all devils from the body! Since that glorious day, no one in our family has aged so much as one minute!"

He pulled a thin vial from his billowing cape. "Behold! These few drops are all that remain, so tonight, beneath the full moon, Magenta must dance again! But first—" He uncorked the vial and drank, then smashed it on the stage and cut a caper around the fragments. "Goodbye, old age! So long, arthritis! Thanks be to God!"

"Thanks be to God!" echoed the crowd as though responding to one of Padre Mendez's Sunday morning exhortations.

Cesar collected his ten knives, depositing them within the folds of his cape, then withdrew a large sombrero from the wagon, which he lay upside down at the fore of the stage. He swept the crowd with his unflinching eyes once more, face by face. "Now, my friends, my

CONTINUED ON PAGE 84

THE BOOK OF HIERONYMUS BOSCH

a sestina by

T.E.D. KLEIN

Although no eye has seen the world of Bosch,
We've wandered through it: hidden in the heart
There lurk the crowded images that dance
Across the paintings, and within the pit
Of even sane men's souls there lies the mad
Arena—Bosch's Carnival of Pain.

Impaled on harp-strings, sinners sway in pain,
As taloned apes (those pets beloved of Bosch)
Careen and swoop about a sky gone mad,
A monstrous furnace.
Trumpets shriek! The heart
Drums faster as the show starts! In the pit
A chorus of the damned bewails the dance:

Around a bagpipe fools and demons dance,
The evil leading weak with prods of pain.
A duck-billed monk emerges from the pit
Of hell to join this dancing throng; and Bosch
Has made his cell the chambers of a heart,
Where some go with God's love, and some go mad.

Nearby this red arena lies a mad
Putrescent garden. Thorns on vines that dance
In grotesque tangles pierce a human heart,
Swollen like some fruit engorged with pain.
But is this tattered plum the heart of Bosch?
Or is it but a plaything of the pit?

The wanderer through this world within the pit
May first conclude its architect is mad.
In time he comes to understand that Bosch
Has drawn the tune to which all mortals dance;
For each man dreads the demon-stab of pain,
And each must dance to bagpipes in his heart.

So Bosch has ripped these horrors from his heart
To make a Traveler's Guidebook to the Pit:
The thorns a symbol of the spirit's pain,
The monk a faith denied and driven mad.
And that tremendous bagpipe in the dance?
An emblem of the body's lust, said Bosch.

The traveler sees that Bosch has searched his heart
To illustrate our dance around the Pit
And who that's witnessed pain dare call him mad?

NOTE. INVENTED AT THE END OF the thirteenth century by the Provencal troubadors, the sestina is among the most complex of verse forms, its rhyme scheme following a strict mathematical order.

Stanza 1:	A B C D E F
Stanza 2:	F A E B D C
Stanza 3:	C F D A B E
Stanza 4:	E C B F A D
Stanza 5:	D E A C F B
Stanza 6:	B D F E C A

To these six six-line stanzas—traditionally written in iambic pentameter—is appended a final stanza of three lines.

"Rhyme scheme" is perhaps misleading, for in fact the same six end-words are repeated throughout the poem, and in the final three-line stanza, all six end-words must be used, three at the ends and three in the middle. The task is additionally complicated by the fact that the final end-word of each stanza becomes the first end-word of the next, producing a repetitiveness that is difficult to disguise.

The sestina that follows was written two decades ago, after my first encounter with the work of the fifteenth-century Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch, creator of such bizarre masterpieces as *The Temptation of St Anthony, The Seven Deady Sins, The Last Judgment, The Descent into Hell* and the celebrated triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. About the man himself relatively little is known, except that he belonged to a mystical order called the Confraternity of Our Lady and was given, as an artist, to arcane religious symbolism. His paintings—lurid visions of salvation, sin, and retribution—are populated by a menagerie of monstrous hybrids that appear to be, as one critic has said, "part animal, part vegetable, part man-made object, part human." They are creatures out of dreams, denizens of an interior landscape once known as hell, and they explain why Bosch was a major influence on the twentieth-century Surrealists. There seems, in fact, something distinctly modern about the world he depicts; it is a world of carnage and carnality, a world at once fantastic and familiar.

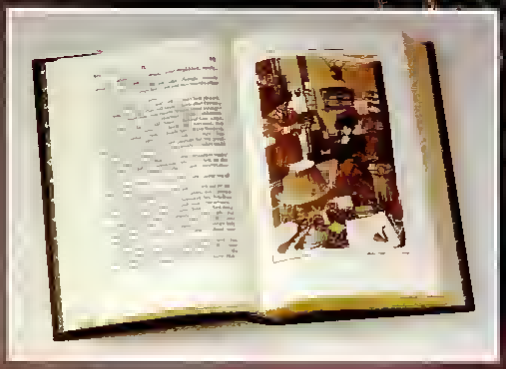
—*T.E.D. Klein*



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SPECIAL FEATURE

COUNTDOWN



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

TO THE MILLENNIUM

INSIDE THE NEW AGE

by MARK ARNOLD

WERE YOU ONE OF THOSE who laughed when Shirley MacLaine went out on a psychic limb last year—from astral projection in Peru to cosmic time-travel in New Mexico? Did you smile as thousands joined hands and hummed at last August's 'Harmonic Convergence'? You may not be laughing long. Evidence suggests that you—or someone you know—may well be signing on to the same spiritual odyssey before the century's end. New Age philosophy, once the exclusive territory of cultists and would-be gurus, is rapidly transforming into what many think will be the major new religion of the Third Millennium.

Once a hodgepodge of pop-psych self-help therapies and Eastern-Mysticism-Made simple, the movement called The New Age is coalescing into a user-friendly theology: a consumer-oriented, feel-good system of philosophy and magic that promises material success and physical well-being in a universe without heaven or hell, guilt or evil, where the new Golden Rule might be *"eternal self-improvement."*

It's more than a mere fad. Indications are that New Age philosophy in some form will be with us and growing through the year 2000 and beyond. The statistics are startling. A University of Chicago study concluded that more than two thirds of all Americans already believe in at least some aspect of New Age occultism, while Palo Alto's SRI Institute thinktank estimated that as many as twenty-five million Americans may soon adopt some or all of its teachings. An estimated five million people worldwide gathered to celebrate a "Harmonic Convergence" of the planets predicted, believers say, by ancient Mayan astronomers. Carl A. Raschke, a University of Denver professor of religious studies, believes the New Age is "the most powerful force in the country today."

Countdown to the Millennium

What's behind the growth of New Age philosophy? First, a quick glance at the calendar reminds us it's barely a dozen years to the new century—historically a time for religious fervor.

But an increasing number of social factors also favor the growth of a new faith more relevant to our times. The daunting problems of this century (nuclear war, eco-disaster, poverty, famine, technological alienation) seem to be getting worse—and most of the twentieth century's grand schemes, from Marxism and Freudian psychology to Flower Power and Reaganism, have been tried and found wanting.

By the end of the century, two of America's largest and most influential population groups—the Baby Boomers and their success-driven younger siblings, the Yuppies—will be facing middle age and an increasing awareness of their own mortality. If they make that big score they've been hustling so hard to achieve, they're likely to reach midlife stressed and disenchanted with material success. Or they'll be disillusioned with the rat-race when they lose everything in the next Wall Street panic. Either way, much of the country is, or will soon be, seeking spiritual reassurance. Literally and metaphorically, the millennium is at hand.

But traditional churches are still in decline. The seventies surge in fundamentalism had begun to ebb even before backlash—months before televangelist scandals became news. Self-ordained gurus of the sixties are discredited even more often than TV preachers. Islam, "ultra-orthodox" Judaism, Santeria and Vodun, although all spreading worldwide, have narrow appeal, while more traditional mystical disciplines like Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism are too rigorous and austere for popular tastes.

In contrast, New Age acolytes are aggressively courting—and adapting their message to—the American mainstream. Especially to affluent and educated middle-class consumers. Spiritual guides now suggest that success and wealth are perfectly compatible with enlightenment. Seekers who would rather eat steak than sprouts are now welcome—retreats that might once have catered only macrobiotic menus have reversed policy to the point of advertising that vegetarians "can be accommodated." New Age events are now held in high profile, highly respectable banquet halls and hotels, rather than YWCA basements and fields. Even the cloying esoteric jargon that permeated New Age

Harmonic Convergence ceremonies at Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, August 16, 1987.

MILLENNIUM

sermons only a few years ago—phrases like 'the quantum beingness of the I-am-ness"—is rapidly turning into plain English.

This drive for mass acceptance is, we are told, fueled by a sincere desire to help new seekers explore the transformational power of the New Age.

Maybe so.

It's also fueled by money.

Of course, a high price tag does not itself discredit New Age teachings, but the symbiosis is striking: increasingly, the New Age seems tailored to appeal to well-to-do yuppies who, in turn, can afford pricey New Age activities, and this success provides a strong commercial incentive to hop onto the New Age bandwagon. Psychic readers (some franchised) and spiritual therapists charge seventy-five to two hundred fifty dollars a session; weekend or week-long seminars and workshops run from one to three thousand dollars; a collection of crystals for meditation and psychic healing can cost in the tens of thousands. Tickets for Shirley MacLaine's "Connecting with the Higher Self" tour went for three hundred bucks—simply, the actress insisted, to separate the sincere from the "merely curious." New Agers might not think themselves market conscious, but companies that produce space music on twenty-dollar compact discs and lectures on seventy-dollar videotapes must assume their customers own CDs and VCRs. Clearly, mystical secrets are no longer reserved—or even meant—for mendicant hippies who have taken vows of back-to-the-earth poverty.

And this consumer orientation, far from limiting the movement's potential, is galvanizing both the growth and respectability of the New Age. It's become a mark of urban status to practice re-birthing, take past-life recall therapy, consult trance channelers. Scores of high-tech and Fortune 500 corporations (including General Motors, Citibank, and General Foods) send managers to "self-actualization" classes. Magazine and newspaper coverage of the New Age has been restrained, even approving—perhaps out of reluctance to offend readers who buy luxury cars, expensive electronics, and healing crystals. The new spirituality is socially acceptable and increasingly chic among professionals, executives, trend setters, and opinion makers. For instance, television's most popular syndicated talk-show host, Oprah Winfrey, often—on the air—credits much of her personal success to her belief in some of the less controversial New Age tenets (and while she's not endorsed the occult, Winfrey has at least once denounced as narrow-minded an anti-spiritualist who attacked reincarnation).

This upward mobility and influence leads Professor Raschke to call the New Age "as much a political movement as a religious movement—and it's spreading into business management and a lot of other areas." Other areas of the world, too—including England, Europe, even the Soviet Union. This suggests a broader agenda: the deliberate dissemination of a social philosophy coated in an easy-to-swallow religious placebo. New Age teaching supports the goal of worldwide transformation toward a new spiritual consciousness.

The idea is not new. The connection between politics, religion, and cultural vigor has long been discussed by historians. Professor Arnold Toynee concluded, from his monumental life study of history, that a religious resurgence (but not a mere revival of current religions) would be vital to the survival of Western civilization. *Five Futures*, a more recent text developed from a Stanford Research Institute projection of cultural trends, speculated that the rise of a new post-industrial religion might be the most palatable alternative to nuclear war, or industrial misuse of Earth's resources.

While there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that cabals of New Age leaders clandestinely plot world conquest—or even world renaissance—it would seem a mistake to underestimate the intelligence, subtlety, sophistication, and determination of many associated with the New Age.

Take Shirley MacLaine. She's certainly taken a lot of kidding in the media, on sitcoms and in the panels of "Doonesbury" for her occult antics. But it seems clear she knows what she's doing. Already a multi-award winning actress and performer with a host of powerful friends ranging from Frank Sinatra and Bella Abzug to Tory MPs and African political strongmen, she's also a seasoned political activist with a quarter century of experience. And now, at midlife, she's successfully launched a new career as a bestselling author and spiritual guide. These are not the accomplishments of a lightweight. Nor is MacLaine someone to be discounted or ignored, especially when she decides to popularize a world order.

And MacLaine is hardly the only prominent or high-powered person in the movement. By all means, laugh if you like at 1987's sideshow of entities, Atlantean power crystals, and Harmonic Convergences. New Agers claim to like laughter, even at their own expense, and the fads may prove to be a carny shill drawing people into the faith of the future.

Creating Reality

There is no "New Age."

At least, there is no unified church with ordained pastoral hierarchies, creeds, dogmas, and gospels. There is, as yet, no Bible. The "New Age" is still

CONTINUED ON PAGE 58



DANCING IN THE LIGHT: MacLaine brought new attention to the New Age.

Mark Arnold, who co-edited the World Fantasy Award-winning anthology Elsewhere, *is a frequent contributor to* The Twilight Zone.

OCCULT '88

—A Guide to What's Hot and What's Not in the New Age.







If you're hip to the latest trends, New Age chat can be your passport to chic. But if you're stuck in *last* year's psychic rut, you'll just sound like a flake. Still, there's no need to despair. You can still get ready for that next big party or Rainbow Tribe Gathering by mastering this up-to-the-eon checklist of the latest trends from beyond:

IN	OUT
Spirit Guides	Gurus
Crystal Power	Pyramid Power
Past-Life Recall Therapy	Firewalking Therapy
Space Music	Playing Music to Plants
UFO Kidnappings	Ancient Astronauts
Atlantis, Lemuria	Mu
Space Gods from the Pleiades	Space Gods from Sirius
South American Earthworks	North American Earthworks
Ancient Wisdom of the Incas	Ancient Wisdom of the Mayans
Mystic Lore of the Huichol Mexicans	Mystic Lore of the Yacqui Mexicans
Brazilian Psychic Surgeons	Filipino Psychic Surgeons
Amazon Sorcerers	Malaysian Sorcerers
Secret Voudon and Santeria Cults	The Illuminati
Child Sacrifice Cults	Cattle Mutilation
Teach Yourself ESP	Teach Yourself Levitation
Edgar Cayce	Nostradamus
Seth	St. Germain
Ruth Montgomery	Jeanne Dixon
Spirit Possession	Demon Possession*
The Harmonic Convergence	The Jupiter Effect

**Unless demons commit sexual assault while discarnate.*

1987 OCCULT SCOREBOARD

BIGGEST WINNERS: They're *heee-re!* Phantom know-it-all yentas from beyond space and time flooded the airwaves in 1987. disincarnate presences made guest-ghost appearances on a network mini-series (*Out on a Limb*), *20/20, 60 Minutes, Donahue, Oprah Winfrey, Sally Jessy Raphael,* and *Larry King*; they were interviewed or covered by *Time, Newsweek, U.S. News, People, The New York Times,* and *The Washington Post*; they wrote books, recorded music, even made videos. They raked in millions. Biggest winners—*CHANNELED ENTITIES.*

BIGGEST COMEBACK: Who'd have thought it? For forty years they'd been the joke of the Unseen World, mocked by even *Fate* and *Weekly World News* while the most accepting Space Brother contactees, saucer cultists, and Unarians jeered at them. Then they discovered sexual molestation, anal rape, and pointy instruments. Nobody's laughing now. Major publishers and even *Ted Koppel* took note. "True" kidnapping and abuse sagas like *Communion* and *Intruders* were the rage of '87, while other cosmic tourists, like Ancient Astronauts and winsome E.T.s, languished in the wings. Biggest Comeback—*Malevolent Little Green Men.*

BIGGEST LOSER. How far can an angel fall? In '87, this One couldn't even get arrested. Mark David Chapman blamed Him for John Lennon's murder, Jim Bakker blamed Him for the PTL follies, Jimmy Swaggart blamed Him for Jim Bakker, Oral Roberts blamed Him for Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson blamed Him for Jim, Jimmy and Oral *and no one believed them!* Heavy Metal bands cleaned out the charts—*after* the top groups dropped Him from their acts. Robert DeNiro played Him (*Angel Heart*) and Al Capone (*The Untouchables*)—the public wanted to see Capone. Jack Nicholson fared better than DeNiro by playing Him for *laughs* (*The Witches of Eastwick*); He was even gigglebait for not one, but *two* running gags on *Saturday Night Live.* Isn't that special? Could it be? Biggest Loser—*SATAN, PRINCE OF DARKNESS.*

UP AND COMING: *WITCHCRAFT* is primed for a big revival in 1988—the number of covens is growing rapidly, particularly among suburban and professional women; Salem, Massachusetts star witch Laurie Cabot was even a factor in last year's local mayoralty race. Specifically, the revival is in *Wicca*, a white (benign) magic tradition involving Goddess worship and nature worship—but a lot of these new practitioners don't seem to *know* they're Wicca. *They* think they're *witches.*

DUE FOR A FALL: *RAMTHA* has had peer problems. Other entities are increasingly taking aim, attacking the ghostly Atlantean warrior-sage's gloom-doom survivalist pitch. The spirits don't blame medium-author JZ Knight; and only disgruntled ex-followers call her a fraud. The astral party-line seems to be that Ramtha (whose name, incidently, is ancient Atlantean for "The Ram") has spent too much time with us down here on the Earth-plane; our fears and psychic longings have disoriented and corrupted him. He no longer knows what he's saying. He needs a good long vacation. However, Ramtha's eccentric habit of investment counselling (the Ram's bullish on JZ Knight's holdings) will not be, to the guides, an issue.

—Mark Arnold

MILLENNIUM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 56

a loosely connected assemblage of spiritual concepts, mottoes, and notions—but one which seems to be quickly gelling into a definite cosmology. For the moment New Agers disagree as to what beliefs and practices are or are not part of the movement; there are striking differences about metaphysical particulars and dynamics. That makes it convenient for one to accept a little, a lot, or all of the menu. It also means many ardent New Agers will disapprove of any capsule description of their philosophy. But there are some key points.

Nearly all New Age thought and occultism derive from two major doctrines, a psychology and life-style theory often called *self-actualization*, and a modernized view of reincarnation. Together they provide, according to followers, a universal viewpoint and blueprint for living; they are also the source of all the catch-phrases and aphorisms that, taken out of context, seem particularly obnoxious to non-New Agers. Here are its essential tenets:

The Universe Within. The Human Potential Movement of the 1970s produced a flock of self-help therapies, many still extant in such groups as Lifespring, Forum (formerly est), Insight, and Silva. "Self-actualization" is a commonly used term for the essential concept underlying all such programs: *Stop whining and pull your socks up.*



COSMIC RECESS. New Agers say death is just a passage between lives

Self-actualization leans more toward Ann Landers pragmatism than toward Freud. True, New Agers say, you have problems in life and those problems aren't your fault. But blame doesn't solve anything. You *won't* progress until you realize that, no matter who did what to you when—your parents, boss, lover, society, school, fate, God, or Devil—ultimately you alone decide what you do with yourself. If you don't like your life, you have the power to change it, by first changing your attitude toward your "unsolvable" problems. This advice is encapsulated in homilies like "writing your own script," "taking charge of your life," "getting it." The current New Age variant is "You create your own reality."

But how does someone "create" reality? Suppose Jane was born with no right hand. Few self-actualizers would claim she can elect to regenerate her hand or choose different birth conditions (New Age occultists might disagree). However, Jane *will* define her life by saying "the *reality* is that I'm a helpless cripple" or "the *reality* is that I can do some things, although I'm severly handicapped," or "the *reality* is that I can do anything I want to—juggle, climb mountains, play music—because a physical challenge is a spur, not a limit." Jane's choice will not only determine her opportunities and activities, but will affect the way others regard and treat her.

No Accidents. Self-actualization might be, for followers, a valuable coping tool—but the plain fact remains that some events *are* beyond anyone's control. In the example above, Jane obviously didn't *choose* to be born physically challenged. Or did she?

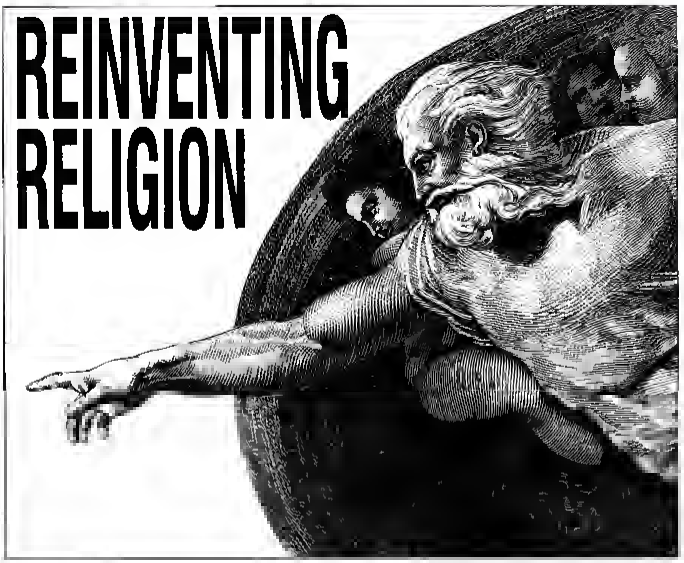
New Agers have revived and modified the ancient idea of reincarnation as a mechanism for explaining spiritual evolution, the state of the world, and even the nature of evil. Souls, we are told, are a natural part of the universe, as imperishable as energy. Entering and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 60



CHANGING CHANNELS. ... and immortal "entities" can show us the way.

REINVENTING RELIGION



Is it possible to start a religion? At first, the idea seems absurd. Real religions are huge, ancient, rooted institutions: sometimes an offshoot schismatic movement (like the Roman Church, say, or the Protestants) will become established; but "new" religions with original gods or doctrines are only cults started by quacks; they may briefly flare into lurid headlines before fading, but never survive or grow ... right? Not always. America, which must by now hold some record for incubating new churches, has already seen the growth of several new faiths. Among the striking examples ...

With all respect to what is now a respected, conservative religion—one hundred fifty years ago it must have been very easy to mistake the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints for a nut cult. Prophet Joseph Smith was a teenager with an arrest record (for holding necromantic rites) when he began seeing visions of Moroni, an archangel unknown to *all* previous theology. In 1830, Smith announced that he had found buried golden tablets (never publicly displayed) inscribed in a secret language; a host of angels helped Smith translate what turned out to be a new Bible, *The Book of Mormon*. Smith was told he was *Mormon's* Prophet; his followers were anointed Saints. Subsequent visions led Smith to declare his followers were not bound to U.S. law, his church was a communitarian political kingdom (all property owned by the ruling theocracy—rather like an Islamic communism), and men should practice polygamy. Most Americans reacted negatively. When Smith was murdered by an angry mob in 1844, he was under multiple indictment for land fraud, banking fraud, bankruptcy, treason, and accessory to attempted political assassination; at the time, the Mormons maintained questionably disciplined private vigilante armies, the most notorious being one called the Avenging Angels. (Anti-Mormon sentiment crossed oceans: fifty years after Smith's death, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes deduced that the vicious murders of *A Study in Scarlet* were the legacy of a "Mormon blood feud" involving the Avenging Angels). But, led by Brigham Young, the Mormons gained sanctuary and political power in the Utah Territory; in 1890 they reformed their policies, emphasized more mainstream values and stern morality, and are now a successful, accepted church.

About a hundred years ago, many lay theologians were trying to reconcile Christian dogma, modern science, and the newfound fascination for occult spiritualism—a thankless task seemingly certain to offend all concerned. Then, in 1875, Mary Baker Eddy, a former chronic invalid, published a self-help text, *Science and Health with the Key to the Scriptures*, in which she argued that scientific knowledge was God-sent and thus good; further, that faith healing was a holy power given to all; so good Christians could also be rationalists and spiritualists. The popularity of her seemingly self-contradictory doctrine led Eddy to found a non-hierarchical institution, The Church of Jesus Christ, Scientist. Thanks in part to the journalistic reknown of the daily *Christian Science Monitor*, and the establishment of library Reading Rooms, Christian Science, contradictions intact, still prospers.

In both cases, what seemed to be fringe religions outlived their founders, entrenched themselves in a social niche, and modified their teachings. Today at least two controversial faiths seem to be reaching the second phase of this process. The Unification Church (started by Korean Rev. Sun Myung Moon) and The Church of Scientology (created by L. Ron Hubbard) have survived the respective deportation and death of their founders; both are shedding their images as street-corner haranging cults; and both have outlasted allegations of crimes ranging from brainwashing to kidnapping, extortion, tax fraud, assault, and conspiracy against the government (not, one notes, charges as serious as those faced by the Mormons). Both are solidifying investments and media bases (Unification owns the conservative *Washington Times*; Scientology's Bridge Publications produces international bestselling fiction and texts by Hubbard, and sponsors contests to encourage new writers). Both appear to be financially and internally stable. Unification and Scientology might well, therefore, be mainstream faiths a century hence.

Indications are that the proliferation of new churches may accelerate—because religion, management, and marketing have discovered each other. In *Cities on a Hill*, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Frances Fitzgerald explored the rise and fall of Oregon's Rajneeshpuram, an attempt to create a planned religious community with statewide political power: according to Fitzgerald, the community failed, not because of the gameplan (largely developed by converted professional managers) but because of a few key personalities. And last year's televangelist scandals certainly exposed the money and corporate politics in personality-dominated religion (if we'd been previously unaware of the growth in Christian broadcasting, communications, publishing, insurance, real estate development, theme-park, cosmetics, novelties, and airline industries). The genies of profit and power are out of the bottle; it is no longer improbable to think of someone inventing a religion, then hiring marketing and political consultants to sell it to the masses.

So not only is the establishment of the New Age as a religion possible—succeed or fail, it might be only the beginning. In the Third Millennium, the business of America may be ... not Business, but Belief.

—*Mark Arnold*

MILLENNIUM

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being released from bodies through the ages, the soul matures and evolves into perfection, eventually merging into a binding cosmic force variously called God, Tao, or the Light. The dominant metaphor of modern reincarnation is that existence is an immensely long version of public school—our lives are like school years, and the ghostly interval between incarnations might be considered the August of the soul.

School may be arduous, boring, narrowly focussed, humiliating, even harmful—but it's the way (in our society) children eventually gain the knowledge, skills, and social habits necessary to participate in mature society. Summer may be wonderful, but eventually most kids want to—or have to—get back into the swim of events. Similarly, New Agers claim there are things we can learn only while physical, thus souls, to mature, must keep coming back. Between lives we can rest, relax, reflect on mistakes we made, make resolutions to do better next time (I *will* study harder! I *won't* hang out in the parking lot with Greaseball and Stinky!). Then we, in effect, set curricula for ourselves that will determine the general courses of our next lives, conditions of our births, even our choices of parents.

Mottos like 'there are no accidents' and "you choose your own parents' seem, at first, absolutely ridiculous. Choose my parents? I'll choose the Prince of Wales or a Rockefeller, thanks awfully. More to the point—who in their right mind would *choose* to be born to abusive inrestuous junkies, born into a totalitarian dictatorship, born with Downs Syndrome?

New Agers believe we elect to accept challenges and hardships even to endure unremittingly horrid lives on occasion, as necessary to growth, to psychic "graduation."

And a basic tenet of New Age thought is that we will all graduate. Some may take longer than others—if you "fail" one life, you'll just have to take it again, until you get it right.

This idea that perfection is inevitable and universal distresses non-believers. Shouldn't Hitler, for one, be beyond redemption? No, New Agers say. *Hitler* is dead; the *soul* who lived that life must now figure out why Hitler was so monstrous, what was learned, and how to redress the wrongs Hitler committed. "Hitler" may have to be sainthike over and over again, may have to personally save, over the course of future lives, *every* single World War II casualty—at which point, debts will have been paid, and that soul will certainly no longer be hitlerian.

Moreover, New Agers feel we keep encountering the same souls in life after life (some New Agers believe these groups are constellations that will merge into unified mega-souls or oversouls): both our friends and enemies in this life will turn up again—perhaps with roles reversed next time.

The belief that we choose even the



THE ASTRAL FAIR

The bewildering array of phenomena now associated with New Age philosophy ranges from the practical to the harmlessly eccentric to the truly strange. Here are just a few of the activities currently available at the astral fair:

Channeled Entities: This recycling of seance mediumship is easily the best known type of New Age magic.

Believers posit the existence of astral spirits, waiting between lives (called "entities" rather than "ghosts") who are willing to talk with us by temporarily possessing the bodies of willing mediums called "vessels" or "channels."

Forerunners to today's entities include the "beings from higher dimensions" who spoke through psychic Edgar Cayce; Seth, who channeled through alleged skeptic Jane Roberts; and the Michael entity, a composite being of one thousand and fifty melded souls, who first manifested at a Marin County dinner party in 1970. Today, most New Age theory comes from channeled transcriptions; there are more than a thousand professional trance channelers in California alone (perhaps ten thousand nationwide) charging anywhere from twenty dollars to one thousand dollars per séance; issuing a flood of spirits, most from other planets, other dimensions, or the lost worlds of Atlantis and Lemuria.

To non-believers, channeling is the most astonishingly vapid scam in the history of con games. Compared to old-fashioned seances, modern mediumship is minimalist—no dark room, handholding, eerie noises, bumps, lights, or ectoplasm (although special effects channeling *is* coming into vogue). The medium sits, goes into trance, and the spirit speaks. The entities, in turn, flat out refuse to perform spectral tricks: they will not find lost keys, summon the shade of Elvis, or convey messages to and from dear departed Aunt Tillie; some utter psychic analyses and predictions, but most avoid any specifics that can be confirmed or disproved. You believe — or you don't. They don't care.

PastLife Recall and the Higher Self: If we've lived before, then breaking through to our memories should help us understand our current lives and relationships. Contrary to popular stereotypes, most people do *not* claim to have been Cleopatra or Napoleon, although many remember lives on other planets. There are several cases of marriages breaking up when one spouse discovers hitherto unknown past-life differences; there is one instanre of a woman committing murder and suicide so that she and her past "soulmate"—not her lover this time around—could hasten their next incarnations.

Geomancy and Planetary Transformation: An often stated goal of the New Age is "personal and planetary transformation." The sorcerous (as opposed to social) reading of planetary transformation extends psychic healing to a global scale in an organized attempt to "reawaken" the Earth to a "higher vibrational level."

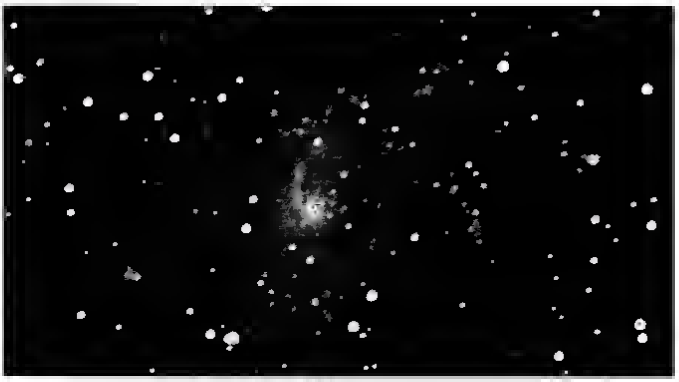
Many occultists have long thought that magic and psychic powers are more easily practiced (and more likely to occur spontaneously) in certain anomalous areas variously called "power spots," "sacred sites," or "earth-energy points." Some places, like Stonehenge, are well known, often as sites of ancient temples; and Celtic lore holds that these places are (in Britain) connected by natural energy conduits called "ley lines."

New Age geomancers go farther, proposing that Earth is, if not actively sentient, at least an immense psychic grid with thousands or millions of small, as yet unmapped "energy centers" which have become blocked, constricting the energy flow, the planet's ability to recover from ecological damage.

Fortunately, according to believers,

directions of our lives explains the New Age doctrine that "there are no accidents" New Agers assume that, on some level, we are attuned to the universe, and therefore we unconsciously but deliberately choose to intersect with the "unpredictable" Although this idea applies to any happenstance New Agers usually consider it a way to explain personal catastrophe, and more poignantly, as solace in the case of untimely death They try to believe that death is not tragic to the victim—the deceased's soul is alive and well and had already elected to leave that particular body, and that death, properly viewed, provides a lesson for loved ones and perhaps society

Potentially, these rationales could make the New Age the religion of the smug and insular If infants "*choose*" to starve in Africa, why should I help feed them? Especially since I'm not supposed to feel guilty about letting them die in agony? Because, New Agers argue, those souls are being born in a famine to help us recognize our kinship to—and responsibility toward—them



FUTURE FAITH: Can "New Age" religion succeed where others have failed?

Together, self-actualization and New Age reincarnation portray a fairly gentle, no-fault cosmos The two doctrines seem to enhance and modify each other New Agers can and will achieve perfection, they believe but don't need to be terribly hard on themselves along the way If they don't control their lives, they probably have good reason Everyone always gets another chance to correct mistakes Those who do wrong won't burn in Hell, they will eventually

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our own psychic powers can open these blocked energy centers And transformational ceremonies at active sacred sites likes August's "Harmonic Convergence" supposedly create a loop effect, augmenting the power of both participants and place. Planetary transformers hope that by reactivating these lost places of power, a spiritually healed Earth will spiritually heal us.

Crystal Power. Crystals, usually polished into prisms and balls, have always been used as aids for meditation and divination But then occultists, claiming to cite principles of electromagnetic field theory, came to believe that crystals work like portable sacred sites, catching, amplifying, and transmitting psychic energy Exploring the potentials and powers of crystals became a major New Age activity.

Recently, the range and extravagance of the "newly discovered" properties—many revealed by entities—suggest that the crystal craze is the Pyramid Power of the eighties Advocates now claim that the secrets of crystals (variously "exclusively" discovered by Canadian Indians, American Indians, Huichols, Mayans, Aztecs, Incans, Africans, Tibetans, Druids, Atlanteans, and Lemurians) can heal, contact spirits, generate invulnerable personal force shields, turn an adept's hands into death rays, improve gas mileage, and descum swimming pools; that Atlantis and Lemuria used crystal pyramids, located on earth-energy sites, as their sole power sources and communications networks, broadcasting energy to cities, and telepathy to individuals who wore crystal headdresses and crystal-embroidered robes. Atlanteans, we are told, stored all their knowledge in crystals, like psychic floppy disks; Atlantean lore can be accessed whenever the fragments of their crystals are found. And crystal pyramids, properly charged, can recall Lemuria from that continent's exile in "the fields of probability." More claims will likely be forthcoming

Other spiritual and physical disciplines associated with the New Age include:

Rebirthing: A variation on yogic breathing regimens that promotes a feeling of wellness and, some practitioners claim, exultation and out-of-body experiences as well.

Empowering: Rituals of self-actualization, often based on shamanistic ceremonies borrowed from Native American or other non-Western cultures.

Creative Visualization: An extension of this popular positive-thinking discipline into the spiritual realm, influenced by the Tantric yoga practice of "breathing light." Simply put, you vividly imagine a goal or object which you desire, and *will* it into existence by tapping into the body's energy centers.

Holistic (or Wholistic) Health: In keeping with the philosophy that we create our own realities, many New Agers believe that physical and emotional health is an organic process which depends on an integrated lifestyle of proper diet and exercise, self-actualization, and spiritual discipline. In practice this can range from mediation and natural foods to the more esoteric forms of massage, acupuncture and pressure, and more demanding forms of exercise such as yoga and tai chi.

Psychic Healing: New Agers have their own version of faith healing. However, unlike Christian charismatics like Oral Roberts, they believe that the power to heal is innate in all of us, and can be tapped without the need for prayer to a higher power As with any form of faith healing, this area of New Age belief carries considerable risks, especially where psychic healers replace, rather than supplement, more conventional medical care.

The Fringe: Still other occult movements are trying to attach themselves to the New Age There are "New Age" tarots, numerology, and astrology systems, and attempts to develop New Age palmistry and phrenology Some groups revive discredited pseudo-medical theories as New Age, such as iridology, reflexology (diagnosis by looking at the eyes or feet) and chromotherapy (the idea that visible light filtered through colored gels has special curative power). Aspects of shamanism, and both Mayan and Aztec "prophecy" are incorporated in some New Age practices. Belief in lost continents and UFO contact is also common.

—*Mark Arnold*



THE IMMERSION

The faithless times were long past.
The old ways had returned.

PETER HEYRMAN

ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT WISNEWSKI

WHEN I WAS TEN YEARS OLD MY FAMILY acted as hosts to Mr. and Mrs. Bannister's immersion. Usually an immersion would take place the day one member of a couple turned seventy-five, but Mr. Bannister's birthday had passed in the summer when our tiny beach town was awash with city folk. Mr. Bannister wanted to use the small pool on the beach that carried the runoff from Silver Lake to the ocean, but he didn't want a crowd of tourists watching. He talked with Reverend Little, and the ceremony was delayed until after Labor Day. By that time the city people were only a memory.

"Do city folks have immersions?" my little sister, Maude, asked my mother. It was early Saturday morning, and we were eating breakfast.

"Of course they do," my mother said as she set a plate of buttered toast in front of Maude.

"But they don't have a lake or an ocean."

"They have their own ways of doing things, dear. But everyone has immersions."

"I'll bet they don't in Africa," Maude countered.

My mother started scrambling eggs. "I'll bet they do."

My father came downstairs wearing white shorts and a white t-shirt, just like me. "I smell breakfast," he said.

IMMERSION

"Why aren't Mr. and Mrs. Bannister here this morning?" Maude asked.

My father turned to her. "Don't you remember when Grandpa and Grandma got immersed? They didn't eat breakfast that day. You don't eat before you take the bread on Sunday. Right?"

'Right. Is this like that?"

"It's a lot like it. It's all in the book."

"Why are we immersing them?" Maude went on. "They aren't our Grandpa and Grandma."

My mother laughed. "They might as well be. They're like family."

"Besides, they never had children," my father said. "By doing this we'll make them kin to us from now on."

"Does that mean I can call them Grandma and Grandpa?"

"You can ask them if you want," my mother said. "Now stop being a little question machine and eat your breakfast."

After we'd eaten, my father and I went next door to fetch Mr. and Mrs. Bannister. Mrs. Bannister was on the porch swing rocking back and forth. Her white hair was pulled into a severe bun. Her eyes were tired.

'Morning, Helen," my father said. "You ready for today?"

"I don't know," she said softly. "I thought I would be, but now it makes me feel so old. First new thing I've done in years, but still it makes me feel like one of those dusty Egyptian mummies that they dust off now and then for a viewing."

"Gawd," said my father. "You make it sound like something morbid."

She laughed quietly. "No, no. Just ancient. And here I am, only seventy-three."

My father smiled cheerfully. "Yes, and Harry's seventy-five, and the book says that's the time."

"It's funny," she murmured. "I'm not completely sure about things. For the first time in my life I'm a little uncertain."

"Now, Helen. It's not going to be painful or troublesome. Why, it's a beautiful thing."

My father put his hand on her shoulder. "You're ready. My mama worried too, but when it was done you never saw a happier woman."

Mrs. Bannister smiled. "Your mother was a special woman, John."

"She was that." He looked at me. "Son, you sit out here and keep Mrs. Bannister company while I go in and see what Mr. Bannister's up to."

"Okay," I said.

"I think you'll find him in the back yard," the old woman said.

She rocked gently on the porch swing, like a metronome set at the lowest of speeds.

"You and Maude will be there, won't you?" she asked.

"Yes, Ma'am," I said.

She smiled wistfully. "Good. I wouldn't want it to happen without some youngsters around." The heat of the September air crowded close around us. Mrs. Bannister picked up the fan from the swing's arm. She flapped it feebly.

"What went on wasn't clean at all," she said. "I guess everybody knew it couldn't stay that way. The wildness had to stop."

"Seventy-three," she breathed. "It's a long time. You know, when I was a young girl they'd barely started with this immersion business. We had the taking of the bread, but immersion was something you only heard about, like when you learn about some Eskimo custom."

"Why was that?" I asked.

'The world was different then. I guess the world is never the same over seventy-three years, but we forget that. Day by day tiny changes happen. Each week tastes a little different from the last, and after many years the world becomes a whole new place. Still people think things were always just the way they are right this minute. It's in our build."

The voices of my father and Mr. Bannister sifted from the innards of the house.

The old woman went on. "I'm told the world was pretty faithless not long before I was born, and there were still signs of that when I was a girl. People enjoyed the lowest sorts of things then. God knows, it had to change, but there was something about it. I don't know. It was a feeling like the smell of the air just before a summer storm, or the spray from a huge wave on a sunny morning." She laughed nervously. "You see what memory does? I know it couldn't have been that way. It certainly couldn't have been clean, now could it?" She looked at me for an answer.

"I'm afraid I don't know, Ma'am."

Her voice came out soft. "No, you don't. Ten years old, and I'm talking to you like you were a grown man. Anyway, what went on then wasn't clean at all. I guess everybody knew it couldn't stay that way. The wildness had to stop. We should thank heaven there were enough people alive who knew the old ways, who could put the faith back in us. Still, I find myself remembering it sometimes, and I always wonder at the memory."

She took a deep breath. My father and Mr. Bannister came out the screen door. Mr. Bannister was thin with age. He was a short reed with white hair puffing out the top. His voice was high, and it lilted when he told a story.

"What you telling the boy, Helen? Filling him up with the spirit of the day?"

"Just talking like a silly old woman," she said.

He came over, and gave her his hand. "Get up, woman. It's our day. We've lived this long, now let's really enjoy ourselves." He tugged. She came lightly to her feet.

"Harry, there are times when I wonder how you get so much smile onto one face."

"By having a wife like you."

She blushed. "I never gave you a child."

He kissed her cheek. "You've given me so much of everything else it hardly matters."

"Let's go," she said nervously.

Mr. Bannister thrust his chin forward. "Yes. Let's go."

We walked the old couple down the steps. My mother and Maude came out of our house. They were dressed in white smocks that were old, but neat. I'd seen pictures of folks who wore fancy clothes for immersions, white suits for the men, and white silk dresses for the ladies. I'd never seen the point. Either the clothes got soaked, or you'd have to stand away from the water and not be part of the

Peter Heyrman's "Pick up" was published in the December 1987 issue of The Twilight Zone. *He has recently completed a novel.*

things.

"Come on now," my mother was saying. "We told Reverend Little we'd be at his house at nine sharp." We walked toward the lake and the ocean. The Reverend's house was on the way.

We passed by the place called: the Strip. The name hung on from nearly a century past. Then it had been a place where tourists had gone to see crazy shows, and drink beer. They'd risk money on strange games, and litter the ground with butts of things they smoked. Gradually the places had gone out of business. My father told me the last of them had closed on the day my Grandpa was born. The buildings still stood, decaying into dust.

We hurried past the Strip in silence. The sun baked the cracked sidewalks, and it felt good to get under the long row of pines that lined the road. Mrs. Bannister lagged. We slowed to compensate for her.

"What's wrong, sugar?" her husband asked her.

Mrs. Bannister looked at six-year-old Maude prancing at the head of our procession. "I'm seventy-three, but there's a tiny piece of me that's as young as her," she said.

"There's a touch of youth in all of us," Mr. Bannister said.

"Why can't it cut the years away?"

Mr. Bannister leaned close and whispered in her ear. "I wouldn't trade a single year, would you?"

"No," she said quietly. I wondered if she meant it. She glanced over and caught me staring up at them. She managed a grin. "Don't listen to an old woman," she said. "It's the ceremony's got me. Anything that reminds an old biddy of her age is like a wound to her. It's so silly now when age hardly matters a bit, but you only get to be silly twice in life, when you're young, and when you're old."

I thought she was about to cry, but Mr. Bannister squeezed her hand tenderly. That seemed to put a stop on her tears.

When we reached Reverend Little's house he was sitting on his steps. He wore baggy, white overalls that covered most of his shirt. His stiff white collar looked odd with that outfit. A wide-brimmed straw hat shadowed his face. He got up and stuck out his hand. Mr. Bannister took it.

"Good to see you folks all ready to go. Lord, how I love a day like today. I got up with the sun, and walked out on the beach to see how the pool was doing. It's perfect with the lake water welling out of it, so warm and sweet. It'll be like a dream, I know it will."

"Thanks for checking on it, Reverend," Mr. Bannister said.

"You know, of all the sacraments, this one moves me the most. And such a day for it."

"A little warm," Mrs. Bannister observed.

"Ah, but the waters will be perfect, and that's where you'll be. We won't even have to shape the sand. It's already just right for the two of you, with room on the sides for the hosts to sit. That's a good sign, you know."

"It was like that for Mother and



Father," my mother said. "It was spring, and the water was sparkling warm. The sand was shaped just like a tub for two."

"And was it good for them?"

"They loved every moment."

"We're a lucky town to have such a beautiful spot for immersions," my father said.

"That we are," the Reverend agreed.

The seven of us walked down past Silver Lake. It wasn't much more than a big pond stretching about a quarter mile from side to side. Its east end ran up next to the high dunes. A pipe ran under the dunes to the beach. In the summer we kept the pipe blocked, but the rest of the year we left it open. The pipe lay a few feet below the surface of the beach so the water bubbled up from it. It carved a small pool in the sand. When the rains were heavy, as they had been that summer, the water would overflow the pool and stream across the sand making a rivulet to the ocean. If you stood where the lake water met the surf your feet would tingle from hot water meeting cold.

We climbed to the top of the dunes and looked down at the pool. The Reverend had been right. It was perfect.

We all took off our shoes and socks. My father looked at the Bannisters. "You ready?"

Mr. Bannister kicked his shoes away. "'Course we are." Mrs. Bannister glanced at her husband, then looked at the ground.

"Come on, Helen," the old man said.

They stepped into the pool. Mr. Bannister plopped into the water. He leaned back against the soft wall of sand, and put his hand up over the side as if to steady himself. The water was up to his neck. He relaxed.

"Feels good."

Mrs. Bannnister bent down slowly. She sat next to him, her hand groping for the opposite embankment. She breathed deeply. She exhaled her cares. A neutral look settled across her features, and suddenly we all let out a sigh. She was all right.

"Let's start," the Reverend said. He pulled a small, dark box from his overalls. He opened it, and extended it to my parents. Each of them took one of the small pieces of silver from it. They were two bright glints in the sunlight. My mother sat down on the embankment next to Mrs. Bannister. She dangled her legs in the streaming water.

"I'm so glad it's you," the old woman whispered, closing her eyes.

"Shh," my mother said gently. She took Mrs. Bannster's hand. My father did the same with the old man. "Come here, Maude," my mother called. Maude came and sat next to her.

I went to my father's side. Reverend Little stood behind the pool facing the ocean. He towered over us. Slowly he began the prayers in the ancient, long-dead language. His tongue tasted words I'd never know. Strange syllables rolled across the air. We bowed our heads, thinking of the married couple and all they meant to us. Finally he looked down and spoke English.

"It's time."

The Bannisters looked as if they were in deep slumber. My father lifted Mr. Bannister's right hand. My mother took Mrs. Bannister's left. They examined the old wrists, then carved signs of the cross with the silver razors.

The Reverend's voice boomed: "To you, Lord, we commend their spirits."

Blood mixed with clear-run water, and rushed to the salt of the sea. ■

LISTENING FOR THE GENERAL

In the mountains, the people sleep,
their dreams whispering
with longings for the general's death.

KIM ANTIEAU

ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HUNT



I HEAR THE GENERAL BELOW, HIS shears squeaking open and shut, open and shut, as I search his upstairs room. The noise stops, and I pause. Ice hits crystal, a familiar, penetrating sound, and I know Susano has brought the General his glass of water with lime. I open drawers, peer behind potted ferns, run a broom under the bed. If anyone passes by, I will become the old cleaning woman everyone sees when they look at me, harmless and above suspicion.

The shears open and close again. I glance outside. Pink petaled flowers fall slowly to the ground, brushing the General's shoes silently. I smile. He oils the shears often, and I wipe the oil away: I want his shears to be like the bell around a cat's neck. I hear footsteps downstairs. I push the broom back and forth on the beige and burgundy rug, sending dust into the air. But no one comes.

The shears stop. The outside spigot creaks open. Water splashes tile as the General washes the garden from his hands before his swim. "Susano!" he calls. Footsteps. Soft grunts as the General undresses. I imagine him balanced on the edge of the turquoise-tiled pool. The sound

GENERAL

of his body hitting the water is startling, like a watermelon striking concrete.

I complete my search, finding nothing. I have been in the General's house for a month; still, I know little more about him than when I arrived. He has few visitors and corresponds with no one. Yet I have heard my people screaming in the mountains because of him. I have watched them die of wounds I could not heal. It is said a traitor whispers our secrets to the General.

I have found no traitor, but I will not return to my village until I do.

The General laughs and splashes once, and then the day falls silent again.

THE HOWLERS WHISTLE IN THE AMANTA TREE like possessed children. A breeze twists its way through the tangled gray branches of the enormous tree, becoming an eerie accompaniment to the monkeys. The General stands in the clearing, staring up at the moon whose light washes away the color of his face and clothes. He is silent, yet when the howlers stop for a moment, I think I can hear him breathing the jasmine-perfumed air.

I wonder if he talks to the moon. Perhaps she is the one who tells him the plans of my people, perhaps she urges him to slice away the ear of an enemy or to leave boys disemboweled for the pigs to eat.

The turkeys do not sleep this night. Deep clicking sounds come from their throats as they pick worms and insects off tobacco leaves. A pig shuffles in the dirt. I turn from the General and look at the mountains blackened with night. In those mountains, my people now sleep, dreaming of times they have never known. Their dreams whisper to me, touching my ears with longings for the General's death. Yet his death would only speed along the advancement of another general, someone worse perhaps, and still we would not know who betrays us. I hear the General come toward me. I do not move. I could end him now with the knife I have hidden in the folds of my skirt. I remain still.

"What are you doing, old woman?" he asks, his voice low, the sound moving up from his chest. These are the first words he has spoken to me.

I turn to him and smile my old woman smile.

Kim Antieau's last appearance in The Twilight Zone *was "Fractures" (December 1986).*

"Listening to the music of the howlers, General," I say. "I hope I have not disturbed you."

He stares at me for a moment and then looks at the amanta tree.

"Music? You call that screeching music?" he asks, staring at the ghost-colored branches. He shakes his head. "No, you have not disturbed me. There are traitors everywhere, so I must be careful. You listen to monkeys? Well, listen for me, old woman, listen for the traitors."

The howlers are quiet, and I wonder if they understand us.

"I am an old woman," I say, "and sometimes I cannot even hear my own thoughts."

"I hear the moans of their lovers," the General said, "the secrets of their comrades. I even hear the worms eating them as they lie buried in the ground."

He laughs and the howlers imitate him. His laughter dies away and he looks back at the tree, squinting.

"Someday I shall shoot them all," he says, and then his feet bend the dry grass, making it crackle like fire licking tender branches as he walks back toward the house.

THROUGH THE CHINK IN THE DOOR, I observe the woman from the city sitting across from the General. She sips champagne quietly. The General drinks his champagne continuously, the sound is like a pig with its nose buried deep in the stomach of a corpse. The light from the chandelier cleanses the room and accents the woman's diamonds and white satin dress. She is very young. I hear a clicking sound, and when I lean forward from my hiding place on the stairway, I see the General tapping his medals with the nails of his right hand.

"Most people believe I received these because I was either brave or brutal," he says. His knife scrapes across his plate as he cuts into his steak. "Both are true, of course, but not important. What is important to my success is that I have not forgotten the ways of the old ones. The rebels and terrorists in the mountains talk about getting their people food and putting shoes on their children's feet. It is all nonsense. The children are better off with their feet in contact with the Earth. They should be grateful to me. I could be harder on them, but I am not an extremist. I am able to keep order for the President by making only occasional raids. I am able to keep order because I remember the ways of our people. Others would be wise to remember the old ones, too."

"I will show you," he says. The cupboard door creaks slightly, sounding like the General's yawn as it moves open. Paper crinkles. The woman picks up the nutcracker—I see her rings flash as she reaches across the table. She places the nut between the metal bars, and then the shell cracks into a million pieces that scratch my ears, bringing my nightmare into this waking time. I close my eyes and the sound reverberates; I hear my nephew's screams again as the machete descends on him and slices through cartilage. His ear drops to the ground in an almost inaudible swoosh. I hear the smile in the General's voice as he orders one of his men to pick up the ear. I wait behind bamboo walls, listening to my own breath and the moans of my nephew until the sound of hooves dies away. The woman cracks open another nut, and tears touch my cheeks.

I hear the rustling of paper again and then something drops into liquid. I lean forward. The General's holding a paper sack. Something brown, like a dried peach, floats in the woman's champagne.

"I know the ways of the old people," he says, "and I listen well. They all wonder why I take only one ear, or why I do not kill all the men outright instead of taking an ear. They don't understand." He laughs, it is more like a gurgle, like someone choking in water. The woman has grown pale and her skin now matches her dress. "I hear everything if I listen closely enough. I hear their thoughts, I hear the moans of their lovers, I hear the secrets of their comrades. I even hear the worms eating them as they lie buried beneath the ground."

I move back into the darkness, not wanting to see the thing floating in the glass or hear it take in champagne like a sponge soaking up water.

How foolish we all were. We have called the General many things, but we never thought of him as one of us. We had forgotten he is of our race, he is a human being. I shudder. He is also someone who serves the old gods, an *ah-men*—or more likely, an *ah-pulyaah*,

a practitioner of black magic. His trick is an old one: if *ah-pulyaah* takes an eye, he can see all that the other eye sees, if he takes a hand, he'll know what the other hand does. If he slices off an ear, it becomes a cornucopia of thoughts and sound.

The General comes to the door and I press myself against the wall. The light is shut away as the door closes tightly. I stand and leave the house, my feet making no more sound than mist does as it settles on the tube roses. I hope the General does not hurt the woman from the city, but I am afraid he saw the fear in her eyes, just as I did.

I scrape bark from the amanta tree and drop the shavings into my bag. The howlers hiss at me. The night is quiet except for a faraway wind pushing trees against the mountain sides. Back in the darkened kitchen, I poke at the fire until it snaps at me, and then I boil the bark. The sounds of bubbles breaking fills the room. Then I wait for the liquid to cool. The house is silent as I stir honey into the bark. My father was an *ah-men* and I used to listen to his chants as a child. His words were not for female ears, and his black magic was something he practiced only occasionally. Yet I had listened. Later I sometimes used the knowledge when I was needed as a healer, the Lords of the Days always served me, apparently unaware of my sex.

I take the newly made *balché* out to the amanta tree, and there I drink it slowly. The turkeys pick, pick, pick. When the monkey howls turn to lullabyes and the sun begins to rise, I take out my father's *zaztun*, a clear stone ball given to him by his father, and I dip it in the *balché*. I chant softly.

The distant hills are bathed in smoky purple. The air surrounding the estate is tinged in gold. A car takes away the woman from the city. I hear her tears as they fall into her palm, like drops of water falling from the tallest tree in the rain forest to the forest floor. The General goes to the garden and begins his day. The shears squeak open and shut. A breeze brings the words of Susano to me as he asks Julia where the old woman is. Ice clicks against crystal. Water hits tile. The General laughs and splashes in the pool.

I drink *balché* and wait for the sun to drop again. When it is dark, the monkeys chatter noisily, as if to hide the sounds of my soles as I go into the kitchen. I drop a large portion of sleeping powder into the General's night drink just before Susano comes for it. Then I take a butcher knife from the kitchen and wait outside with the monkeys, sharpening the blade, until the house grows silent with sleep.

Ferns brush my cheeks as I walk up the stairs. Inside the General's room, I scratch matches against metal. The flame hisses and bursts gold. I light the lantern. The flame spits at me as it illuminates the General's face. I dab the skin around his ear with alcohol. He does not move.

I put the blade to his ear, and then swiftly, I force the knife down. For a moment, I hear sounds like a machete slicing through cornstalks, the room glows gold and I am not certain where I am, and then the ear falls away from



the General's head. I watch black liquid stain the sheets and hear it seep into the linen like misty rain falling on soldier's fatigues. I wrap his head with bandages. The General moans once. I place his ear on one of his silk handkerchiefs. Then I pull out the *zaztun* and wave it over the ear. The clear stone squeaks on its chain like the General's shears. My chants fill the house. I hear them travel outside where the monkeys repeat my words.

When I am certain the Lords of the Days have heard me, I wrap the ear in the handkerchief. I listen to the General's uneven breathing. Now we shall know his thoughts, too; his ear will be better than the warning bell on a cat. I go downstairs and get the paper sack from the dining room. The only sound is the crackling of the paper against my hand. I imagine the ears pressed against the sack, listening.

I leave the house and take a horse from the stables. I ride past the amanta tree where the monkeys click and past the tobacco field where the turkeys gobble worms. I hold the ear close to mine to hear the General's dreams. His dream sounds are empty—like splashes of water in a turquoise-tiled pool. The horse knows the mountain well and it carries me quickly toward my village. I am not afraid of the dark because I know the General's men do not come out at night. Insects snap at the ear, drawn to its sound like moths to a light. The General's dreams keep me company through the night.

The sun lights the sky as I arrive at my village. People gather round me, offering food and drink. I had not told any of them where I had gone. Now they question me. I listen to the ear, and the sounds of the General's screams come to me. He has discovered his loss.

"This is the General's ear," I say, sliding off the horse.

"Only his ear, grandma?" one of the villagers says as I open the handkerchief. "Is he dead?"

I shake my head. "I have done better than kill him."

Suddenly everything becomes quiet. I look around. I hear tortillas sizzling, a dog barking, my horse's urine spraying the ground, yet it is quiet. I gaze down at the ear in my hand, and I realize I am no longer hearing the sounds which accompanied me to the village. The General is silent.

WE HEAR NEWS OF THE *MATANZA*—THE slaughter—long before it reaches us. The General is no longer content with taking parts of us, we are told; instead, he is killing us all. I wave my *zaztun* over his shriveled ear and call up the Lords of the Days. They do not listen. The young people either laugh at me or curse me for letting the General live as they make preparations to leave their homes.

I am inside my hut when the General rides into the village. His horses breathe hard, sucking in the dusty day. The soldiers' guns bang against their legs, making a strange metallic thud. I peer through the bamboo walls. The General sits on his palomino, his head turned away from me. I can see the scar where I cut off his ear. It has healed nicely. He twists his head around. The other scar has not healed as well. It is ragged and red where he cut—or tore—off his ear. Now I understand why the Lords did not hear my chants.

The General motions to his men and the screaming begins. As I run from my house, I hear his head move, the bones in his neck cracking, and I know he is looking at me.

"Old woman!" he screams, his words twisting into the howls of the monkeys who sit like ghosts in the old amanta tree. His words fill my ears as the sounds die all around me. ■

SNOWCREST

The snow has currents like the sea.

RANDOLPH CIRILO

ILLUSTRATION BY CLAUDIA TANTILLO



BRIAN FEARED THE SNOW. He studied it from the living room window, while the heat of the crackling fire washed over his back. He didn't like the way the drifts crept up the street or the side of the house like a cat stalking its prey, for it seemed to change most everything. The trees looked naked and shriveled, desperate to vanish into the earth. Ominous clouds consumed the sky. Even the neighbors' car wailed at the prospect of leaving the driveway. And no matter how many times he shoveled the sidewalk, it was defiantly blanketed again the next day.

"Where's David?" Mother asked, still groggy from her afternoon nap.

"Outside. I've been keeping watch."

Brian knew that his little brother enjoyed the frozen landscape. Encased in a heavy jacket and ski cap, his face invisible except for a bright pink mouth, he clambered up the hill that abutted their yard and then descended on this sled. Inevitably, the snow skittered after him, lapping at his feet and legs. Brian worried that, one day, the drifts would lose their reticence and suck David into the horrors that lay beneath the surface.

"He's like his father," Mother said. "So very independent. You'd better bring him in."

Brian struggled into his coat. He glanced at the photograph on the mantel—father and sons constructing a sandcastle—and wished that he didn't have to be the man of the house. He would have preferred to fight imaginary battles on the alien terrain of his mattress, but with Snowcrest so close at hand—that time when the drifts were so impossibly high that even a single additional flake might upset the entire structure—there was a great deal to see to, including his wayward brother.

"He hasn't learned to be afraid yet," Mother continued, picking at the cast on her leg. "It'll be easier for you when he does. The window is the best place. You know that. The snow can't sneak through."

As soon as Brian stepped out the door, a new snowfall commenced. The flakes assailed his eyes, eager to blind him, but an upraised hand kept them at bay. He trudged across the lawn, sinking here and skidding there, until he arrived at the base of the hill. The sled-marks in the snow resembled scars on pale flesh. Above, David tossed snowballs at the trees and shouted "Die, scumbag!" whenever one hit.

"Time to go in," Brian said.

"But I don't want to."

"Tell Momma that."

"Dad would've let me play. He wasn't afraid."

"What do you know? You weren't even four when he left."

SNOWCREST

'If he'd been afraid, he wouldn't have gone north like Mom said. That's where the snow comes from, isn't it?"

David slid down the hill one last time, leaping to his feet afterward with a triumphant howl. Countless flakes dappled his cheeks like teardrops. Brian attempted to brush them off, but his brother only groaned and ran on. Mother smiled at them from the window, her face framed by crusts of snow which glistened wherever the glass was warmest.

"Maybe Dad's made it to the North Pole by now," David said. "Maybe he's with Santa Claus."

'I don't think it would've taken him five years to get there."

The snow fell more thickly, like a lace curtain billowing in a breeze. It fluttered about their steamy breaths and ultimately alit on their lips and tongues. Disturbed by the sense of invasion, Brian clutched his brother's hand and pulled him into the house. The cold pursued them but shattered as the door slammed shut. The fire glowed brightly, pleased with their return.

"Come hug me, David," Mother said. "You've got to be more careful. Look what the snow did to me and I was just clearing off the porch."

"You slipped."

"No, David. It was waiting."

Perched on the sill, Brian watched the snow careen across the yard. Sometimes it broke against the porch like a wave or pelted the glass only inches from his face like a swarm of frenzied insects. And every obstacle in its path was transformed into a menacing white hump, part of the greater whole.

"We'll have to pray especially hard tonight," Mother said.

'It'll be okay, Momma," Brian replied. "Maybe there won't even be a Snowcrest this year."

But the drifts grew higher with each passing moment. By comparison, hope seemed as fragile as Mother's bones.

BRIAN AWOKE AFTER MIDNIGHT. He hesitated to emerge from the protection of the blankets, for the snow might have found an entrance and accumulated in every corner of the room. He could readily imagine being borne to the hungry drifts outside, to be devoured like the streets and the houses and the lawns.

He gathered his courage and peeked. Moonlight seeped through the window, lending the aspect of a face to the patchwork of frost. Dark holes served as eyes, serrated strips of ice defined a crooked grin. And when it spoke, its voice was Mother's.

"I see you out there, all cold and white. Pieces of you in the trees and on the fence. I could melt you with a match, send you running into the ground."

Brian quickly realized that the words had issued from the room next door—Mother's room. As Snowcrest approached, she often addressed the frigid world beyond the house in personal terms, particularly while she slept.

The cold floor stung Brian's feet; the window rattled; snow plummeted from the eaves. Each event seemed to foreshadow Snowcrest.

"Go away," she continued. "Leave us alone."

Brian recalled the explanation that Father had given him only days before the final fight.

"Her car broke down on the highway one night. You and David were with the sitter and there wasn't another soul for miles. Then the snowstorm came and practically buried her. She survived, but not the child she was carrying. She's been kind of broken up inside ever since, blaming the snow and me for not being there."

As Brian's eyes adjusted to the dark, he scanned her many presents: the book about dinosaurs, the matador's sword from Mexico, the electric train. They made him feel loved and so he promised God to be good. For her sake.

"And I'll make David promise, too," he muttered.

Mother's bed creaked like a restless animal; the snow shifted overhead, tightening its hold on the roof. Brian aimed a finger at the glowering face which adhered to the window and, with a burst of laser-fire, destroyed its vision. Now, as long as he maintained complete silence, he would be safe.

The blankets grew warmer, the pillows more comfortable. Before long, he dozed off. His dreams sprouted from the story that Mother had read to them at bedtime—"Hop-Frog." Crippled dwarves scuttled across the yard and hid beneath the snow. Brian knew that he had to protect the family, but their numbers were far too large. They poured into the house and carried Mother into one of the drifts. Her lost baby waited there, happy to suckle at her breast and warm itself in her embrace.

When Brian rose the following morning, he felt glad that dreams were so difficult to remember. Similarly, the icy face had been transformed into harmless beads of water. The tepid sunlight, however, soon gave way to the gloom of another cloudbank.

The cold floor stung Brian's feet; the window rattled; snow plummeted from the eaves. Each event seemed to foreshadow Snowcrest. Brian studied his features in the bathroom mirror and wondered if the flecks of gold within his irises comprised his fear.

THE SHOVEL SCRAPED OVER THE SIDEWALK like fingernails across a chalkboard. Daunted by the yards of work still ahead, Brian paused to watch the sleds race down the hill. As usual, David led the pack, taking time between runs to toss snowballs at the stragglers. Playful shouts filled the air.

"Be on guard," Mother called. "It's deep enough to drown in out there."

The redness of her eyes and the dark bags underneath were worrisome. In addition, Brian felt sure that her immobile leg would prevent her from righting things by way of her annual ritual.

I could take her place, though, he thought.

At the height of Snowcrest, she would inevitably remove an item from the cutlery drawer and venture into the night. "Don't let anyone in," she always told them. "And, for God's sake, keep the fire burning." An hour later, she would return, her arms laden with small presents. Then, while he and David were distracted, she would scurry to the kitchen, wash whatever she had taken and place it back with the knives and such. Afterward, her hugs assured them that the snow had been stripped of its power.

It would not be difficult to duplicate her actions, particularly since he

Randolph Cirilos' first story, "In the Shadow of the Castle," was a winner in our 1985 Short Story Contest.

knew how she spent the lost hour. Four years earlier on the morning subsequent to the ritual, he had climbed the hill in search of David and discovered the phrase "For the child" carved twice onto a tree, the uppermost line covered with fresh sap. In the interim, two more repetitions had appeared.

Four in all. Brian thought. One for each Snowcrest. Sort of like a prayer.

He sank the shovel into the snow and encountered a reddish discoloration. A few tentative probes revealed a dead cat. Its chest had been gnawed open and shreds of gray flesh hung from its claws. Something had been at its eyes as well. Afraid that Mother would see it, Brian camouflaged the body with some snow, scooped it up and carried it to the trashcan behind the house.

The window jerked upward on his return. "There's a stain on the sidewalk," Mother said. "Did you find something?"

"Just some trash, Momma."

"Well, don't take chances. Sprinkle some salt there and say a 'Hail Mary.'"

"... And look over by the mailbox. See that lump in the snow? Do the same thing, but don't dig it up."

"It's the rock garden. It's always been there."

"No. The snows got currents like the sea. Things can move. Where else did that trash you found come from?"

David rushed to them, the sled bouncing maniacally in his wake. "Sharon invited me to a party," he said. "Can I go, Momma?"

"I thought you didn't like girls, except maybe for Amy," Brian said.

"Sharon's okay. Besides, her brother's got some great toys."

"You do your father proud," Mother said, her tone almost bitter. "Why don't you come on in and tell me about this party? I'll make you some hot chocolate."

Brian continued with his chore. Once he reached the curb, he turned to admire his handiwork, taking comfort from the solidity of the concrete. Here and there, however, the snow had already breached his carefully wrought borders like knitting skin. It even seemed to tug at David's sled, dragging it down.

He trotted up the sidewalk, aware of the odd shapes on either side. He recognized most of them, as in the case of the rock garden, but others remained mysteries and inched subtly in his direction. He slammed his shovel in to the closet, the snow flattened. Then he speared the area, but the expected blood failed to bubble forth. After a few more blows, he quit, because he thought he had penetrated deeply enough to reach the soil and yet hadn't.

"Hail Mary," he whispered, "Full of grace ..."

David's companions disappeared behind the hill. In their place, a barren tree—the one marked 'For the child'—rose toward the clouds like a scream, shaking loose a harsh wind which nudged the drifts ever closer.

"... now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

"TONIGHT I'LL READ 'HOP FROG'," Mother said.

"But you did that yesterday," David whined.



"Don't contradict me. Your father used to do that all the time. ... He sent the snow. Did you know that?"

"David didn't mean anything, Momma," Brian said.

"'Two are enough.' He said it again and again. Men don't understand about children. They don't hold them inside and feel their souls blossom.'

Mother's voice faded, on the verge of sobs. Then she brightened suddenly and began her recitation. Meanwhile, Brian stared at the fire, wondering why it grew dimmer and cooler with each succeeding night. He prodded the logs with the poker and noted, for the first time, how much ashes resembled snowflakes.

"Are you listening?' Mother said. 'It's impolite to pretend."

She didn't wait for an answer, plunging into the story once more. Though bored by the repetition, Brian felt thankful that it kept her gaze off the half-open drapes and the heavy snowfall beyond. David, however, was far less tolerant. With an exaggerated frown on his lips, he drew stick figures in the dust which had accumulated atop the sideboard and sighed loudly at every opportunity. When Mother finished, he readily scrambled to bed.

"Check the doors and the windows, Brian," Mother said. "Tell David that if he hears any strange noises, he should pull the covers over his head and pray for morning to come. That goes for you, too."

That night, Brian dreamed of a crippled dwarf which bore David's features. It ran blithely over the roof and tossed snowballs at the sky. Then it leapt into a drift, the hollow sound of its landing followed by a cry for help. Brian rushed outside, clad only in his pajamas, and dug into the snow with his bare hands. Shortly, he discovered the body, but David's face had been replaced by a mass of torn and bloody flesh.

Awakening, Brian's first thought was that the dream had been a warning. In order to ease his mind, he tiptoed to David's room, sat at the foot of the bed and watched his brother sleep. He recalled what Mother had said about currents in the snow and tried to imagine what kinds of oddities might wash up on their porch before dawn: perhaps sufficiently alive to climb to the chimney and drop into the ashes only a yard or two from Mother's legs.

"Daddy," David whispered, his expression utterly vulnerable.

Brian longed to kiss his brother's brow but was afraid of rousing him. Instead he removed the extra blanket from beneath the bed, wrapped it around himself and rested his head against the bedpost, determined to stand guard. Sleep quickly overcame his feeble resistance.

"Wake up, dumbhead!" David said. "What're you doing there?"

"I guess I was sleepwalking last night."

"Sometimes you're even weirder than Mom. Hey, look!"

David ran to the window. Outside, the drift was so high that it blocked the lowest row of panes, while near the street the mailbox had almost been swallowed completely, resembling nothing so much as the tip of an old man's skull. A snowplow chugged by in a cloud of black smoke; David examined it intently.

"Do you think Dad'll ever come back?" he asked.

"I don't know," Brian replied. "Maybe."

"Whenever a strange car passes, I expect him to be in it. Sometimes even the garbage men look like him. He didn't really send the snow, did he?"

"No. Mom imagines a lot of things. That's why we have to take care of her."

SNOWCREST

and not make her worry"

David wrenched the window open and allowed the snow to lunge in.

'Jesus, David! What did I just tell you?"

"I'm not afraid. If I climb the hill and lay down under a tree, the snow sort of talks to me. Like Mom used to when I skinned my knee or my stomach hurt. It's softer than she is, too.'

"So what're you going to do? Live in it?'

David pushed most of the overflow off the sill. Then he separated the remainder into four gobbets which he aligned like toy soldiers.

"They're just going to melt,' Brian said.

'I only need one. The very coldest. I'll put it under Mom's bed and it'll make her happy.'

'She'd kill you if she found out. Besides, she's probably awake already."

"So I'll hide it in the freezer for tonight."

Sighing, Brian hurried to Mother's room so he could kindle a new fire. He found her in a state of disarray, the typical result of a sleepless night. She was also wheezing slightly at the end of each breath. As he rearranged her blankets, he noticed that she had repeatedly written 'Father, Son, Holy Ghost' onto her cast.

'Don't make a fuss," she said.

"But you're sick. Maybe I should call the doctor."

"No. Snowcrest is here. Nothing will be right for as long as it lasts."

"Then tell me what to do. I can go out tonight. I can carve the words on the tree. I can even buy presents for you and David.'

Mother smiled sadly. "The snow would take you forever. I couldn't bear to lose another child. Just stay inside and pray with me."

Brian knelt at her side, hiding his tears with his hands. He could smell her sweat. Though far from pleasant, the pungent aroma was peculiarly hers. Alone, he could recall it more readily than the color of her eyes or the shape of her mouth.

"Remember when we all went to the beach?' he asked.

Mother nodded. 'On the last day I took that picture of the three of you.'

"And the sandcastle," Brian added. "Afterward, you led me out to the rocks to feed the seagulls. Then we walked across the sand and let the waves catch us. I could feel things moving under my feet, but it was okay because you held my hand."

"Your father still loved me back then."

"It's funny how I remember you and David remembers Dad. Like that day was the only time we were ever a real family.'

Despite the fire's heat, a draft licked Brian's neck. He could feel the snow, as distended as a pregnant belly, pressing upon the house with the whole weight of the sky.

'Brian? Is that David?'

Brian glanced past the frosty panes and spotted his brother dashing from the house. He had donned a jacket and boots, but he still wore his pajama bottoms. His sled glided after him at the end of a rope. With each new step, he sank deeper into the snow, the effect compounded by the crumbling of the nearest drifts. At one point, he stumbled and disappeared completely, only to rise again, whooping joyfully.

"Bring him back!" Mother exclaimed, the edge of the sheet tightly entwined among the fingers of both hands. "There's no protection!"

"Bring him back!" Mother exclaimed, the edge of the sheet tightly entwined among the fingers of both hands. "There's no protection!"

Brian hurriedly dressed, but by the time he left the house David was nowhere to be seen. As a further hindrance, the powdery snow washed back and forth in the dying breeze, erasing any trace of human contact. Mother knocked on the window and said 'the hill," her voice made remote by the intervening glass. Her eyes were wide with terror.

'David!" Brian shouted. "Mother wants you inside right now!"

He heard a noise but couldn't tell if it was David or his own echo. He plodded across the yard, until the snow began to slither into his boots where it melted and worried his feet. Then he looked back and saw Mother bobbing feverishly up and down, little more than a pale extension of the drifts which clung to the walls like scrabbling claws.

'Come on, David! Don't you want breakfast?'

At the base of the hill, he noticed a dark spot beneath the frozen veneer. Immediately, he dropped to his knees and dug, certain that David had managed to get himself buried. Without gloves, his hands burned at first but soon became insensate scoops. For all his efforts, however, the spot drew no closer. Its size alone increased.

Jesus, God, don't let him die, he thought.

The spot assumed the shape of a face. Then, after several desperate thrusts, a hard-packed layer of snow disintegrated and exposed an ear. The surrounding hair was the color of David's, but when Brian scraped off a cheek, he discovered stubble. A few inches lower, the neck was crisscrossed by two deep, though bloodless, slashes.

"Daddy?"

Snow tumbled from the mouth and a hint of steam emerged. Brian attempted to flee, but a calloused hand held him fast by the ankle. The resultant struggle uncovered the torso, which exhibited two punctures—the first over the heart and the second below the breastbone.

Four wounds in all. One for each past Snowcrest.

"Come home with me, son."

The body fell back and jerked Brian down with it. Then the snow cascaded over them like an avid tongue. It caressed the boy from head to foot, rushing into his nose and mouth and eyes. Just before he lost consciousness, the day on the beach flashed through his mind: the sandcastle, Mother's smiles, David riding on Father's shoulders, happiness.

A few minutes later, David appeared atop the hill, sledded recklessly down and crashed at the edge of the yard. Rolling to his feet, he glimpsed Mother standing at the window and waved. Then he realized that she couldn't possibly stand with her leg in the cast. And she had never been as tall as the topmost part of the windowframe.

He ran across the snow. He didn't notice the set of footprints that ended abruptly where his sled lay. He only had eyes for the trail of slush that led past the open door and to the reclining figure of Mother. As he touched the crystalline kiss on her stiff blue lips, a pair of frigid arms swept him skyward.

Their laughter filled the room like swirling snowflakes. ■

WHIMPER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37

ing these three "simple" steps, Jack Fitzpatrick claimed that he could, for example, watch fifteen movies on Times Square in a single two-hour stretch, for a single six bucks, and go home ten minutes before the first movie ended with the same six dollars still in his pocket.

Or he could walk through the same Time Square, having already seduced every woman he wanted in little more than the time it took to look at them. He could do whatever he wanted to whomever he wanted, no matter how indulgent or depraved; in the end, no one was the wiser. A marginal fraction of "real" time passed in the "real" world, something on the order of a year to the minute; he could be in and out of a girl's bed and back on the street in the time it took for her to shoot him down. They never knew what hit them. Only Jack knew.

The only place it showed was in his eyes.

AS THE NEW YEAR LOOMED ON THE HORIzon, the world's collective prospects looked gloomier than ever. It sometimes appeared as though the forty years of bad hype courtesy of George Orwell had not missed the mark by much. We didn't quite have Big Brother yet, but the lag-time had allowed the climactic thrust of the Reagan administration to foment a secret war in Central America, the Meese commission to bash sex, the PMRC to bash rock 'n' roll, and a tee-vee Holy Moe to run for President—if God-fearing patriots everywhere would fork over a cool three million toward the cause. And everyone on the other side of the fence seemed to have developed a real sour feeling about the future of the species.

It wasn't until right around the Republican Convention that the full extent of Jack's potential became clear. Jack had always been the kind of guy who could have been anything, the simple truth of that was a blessing, and a curse. He showed promise as a gifted painter, writer, photographer, musician, architect, and auto-mechanic. He had a firm grasp on three languages, a head for figures, a way with words, and a keen sense of what constituted a good deal. He learned quickly and retained knowledge like a microchip. He could have risen meteorically to the top of any of a dozen fields; indeed, there didn't seem to be anything beyond the scope of his grasp.

But he couldn't seem to *focus* it on any one thing long enough to see it through. He had dropped out of NYU in his third year, a fact which had slaughtered his parents even more than the knowledge that he had changed majors so many times that they'd simply lost count. Then he bopped through everything from mysticism to metallurgy to heavy metal to motorcycle maintenance; still, nothing ever seemed to stick. Finally he left New York altogether, taking his quest out into the world at large. He hitched through Europe and hiked through Central America, smoked hash in Amsterdam and got blasted on *basura* in Bolivia.

Eventually he came back, and landed the messenger job where we first met. Time took its stately, measured course, and, two and a half years later, there he still was, like me, working as a messenger, making not much more than two hundred dollars a week. Before taxes.

One damp February eve found Ronbo on the tube, lying through his wisened puss about the State of the Union. Jack and I sat in the back of the Blarney Stone pub on Madison, downing cheap drafts and blowing off steam after another cold day on the streets.

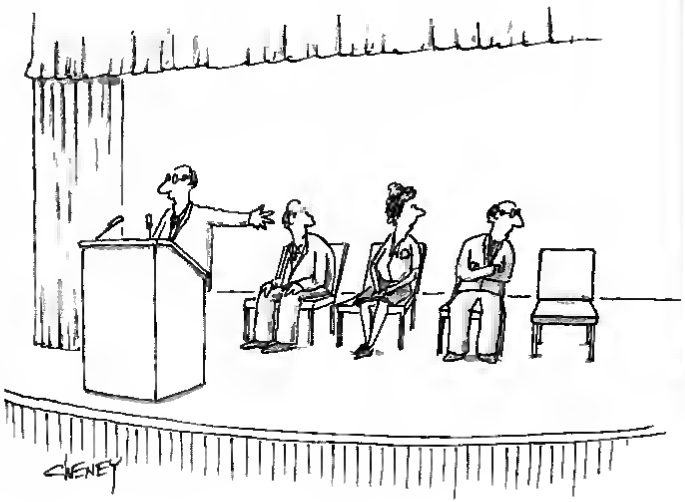
"Scott?" he said. Scott Wachter is my name, by the way. You'll be hearing a lot of it in the future. Make sure you get the spelling right: W-A-C-H-T-E-R. "Scott?" he repeated, levelling an extremely pointed gaze in my direction. "If you could think of one thing the world needs more than anything else, what would it be?"

"Hamsters," I muttered, mocking his *el serioso* stance. "The world just needs more of the little furry fucks. Three for every boy—"

"I'm serious—"

"—and five for every girl," I continued, undaunted. "*Six* for Fearless Leader over there." I gazed at the flickering screen behind the bar. "He can stuff them in his cheek pouches." On the tube, the President smiled his homey, inward grin, revealing ample storage facilities.

"You're a jerk," he bitched, blowing smoke in my face. He was trying so



"And now I'd like to introduce our fourth and final speaker for this evening, who will enlighten us on the subject of fantasy and escapism."

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hard to be topical.

Weary, I drained my mug and let the rag die. "We solved all the world's problems *yesterday*, remember? Everything's fine now."

"Scott," he said, his features wound tight. I looked up, his eyes, far wiser than they had any right to be, flitted over my features like a bar-code scanner. "If you could do *anything* . . ."

There was no escape. I sighed, gave it a microsecond of serious thought, shook my head and replied, "The world needs a major overhaul, my friend."

"No shit." There was an uncomfortable urgency in his tone. "But how would you kick it off? What approach? Politician? Scientist? Corporate Turk?"

"Butcher, baker, candlestick maker . . ."

"Asshole," he spat. Jack was deep in his cups. My feet hurt. I sat, thoughtfully pouring the last of the pitcher into our mugs. Then I took a hefty swig of mine and wiped my moustache, which I'm sure all great philosophers are wont to do at such times, and delivered my verdict.

"No one man is *ever* going to be able to do it, because no one *thing* is ever going to do it."

Jack stopped in mid-swig. His eyes opened wide and he stared into the middle distance as if he'd just taken a faceful of seltzer. And when he turned that gaze back to me, it was filled with a realization that puzzled me then, and awes me now. Because Jack Fitzpatrick suddenly saw it all very, very clearly.

Q: *If you could do absolutely anything, but no one thing is ever going to do the trick, what would you do?*

A: *I'd do it all.*

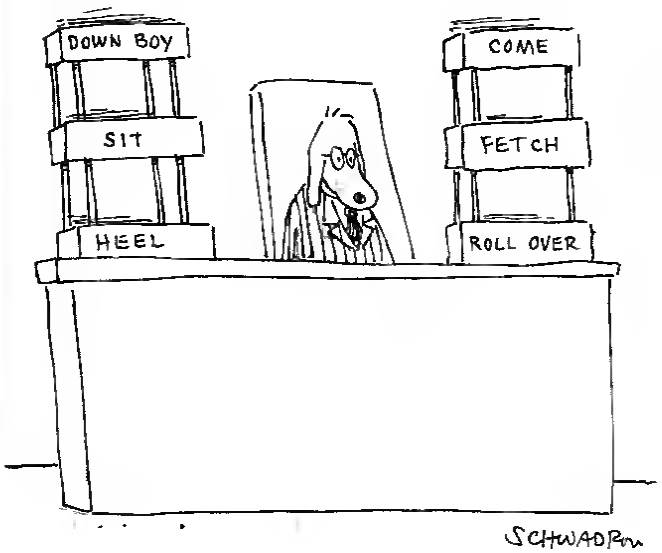
Jack Fitzpatrick lived over one thousand full and productive lives over the next eleven months. They all shared the same childhood, the same adolescence. Their common jumping-off point was twenty-four-year-old Jack Fitzpatrick, a young nobody who still toted flak and subpoenas for a living by day . . . and who each night engaged in what might possibly have been the most radical transformation in human history.

He started with the sciences. One by one he tackled them all, devoting one entire lifetime to each individual discipline. He took Buckminster Fuller's concept of the Deliberate Generalist to its penultimate extreme by becoming an expert at everything.

Not that all this information just leaped into his head, mind you; mild-mannered messenger one moment, Wile E. Coyote genius, the next. He had to work his duplicitous butt off. Twenty-seven is a little late to be starting in some fields of endeavor—like med school, for instance. But he had support: parents who were again and again overjoyed to see their wayward boy filling out student loan forms. The challenge of being the perpetual latecomer only helped fuel his fire.

And like ol' Bucky Fuller, Jack endorsed the principle that anyone of average intelligence, given enough time, could get a basic understanding of the perfect technology that underlies Universe. And Jack had a good bit more than average intelligence.

And quite literally, all the time in the world.



His first life he spent as an astronomer. It seemed as good a place as any to start. ("Best to know where you is before you try to get someplace you ain't," from *The Wit and Wisdom of Jack Fitzpatrick*, copyright 1999, Bantam Books.) He lived well into his seventies, and did some distinguished work—nothing flashy, didn't redesign the cosmos or anything, but it helped to lay the groundwork for his next life as a master of quantum physics. And his next after that, as a biochemist. And his next four, as a neurosurgeon, psychiatrist, physician, and homeopathic healer.

By the sixth or seventh he was starting to pick up Nobel prizes. On a very regular basis.

He made two overwhelming discoveries in April: one of them marvelous, the other absolutely terrifying. I'm leaping ahead in my narrative to tell you this, and I apologize for the interruption, but it was at this precise point, when Jack told the story *to* me, that *he* was forced *to* make the same digressing.

"What do you want first," he asked me, "the good news or the bad news?"

"The good news," I muttered, hoping that he might say "April Fool!" and

smack me in the face with a pie. I was getting a wee bit concerned about my erstwhile best friend. Lord knows, I must have looked like a man receiving a ballpeen suppository, because Jack busted up laughing.

"Okay, okay," he said, "the good news is that I found out that I can bring artifacts from the future. I'm not sure why, but anything *I* create—anything by my hand or bearing my likeness—can squeeze back with me." He grinned beatifically.

"Uh-huh." This was a twist in his otherwise ridiculous fantasy. To date, I'd seen no evidence. "So what, are you gonna show pictures of your grandchildren?"

"They're at home," he said, deadly earnest. "All one hundred ninety-seven of 'em. Three volumes worth. Don't you want to hear the bad news?"

"They were all ugly," I sniggered. "A hundred and ninety-seven little mutants."

"Not funny. I was a geneticist twice and lived through three meltdowns, Bucko. Saw a lot of that shit. But that wasn't the worst of it."

"Oh, no?" My sarcasm was a thin veneer disguising how miserably uncomfortable I was watching Jack do his I-are-a-mental-case schtick. "And what, pray tell, *is* the worst of it?"

"The worst of it," he lit a cigarette with steady hands, "is that right around fifty years up the road, the world always ends."

"Uh-huh . . ." I began, and my voice kind of fizzled in my throat. Maybe it was the chill certainty in his eyes, sorrow wrapping his words like an orphan's threadbare blanket. Maybe it was simply succumbing to this relentless departure from reality as I understood it. Any way you slice it, the walls of my skepticism started caving in like a sand castle against the onslaught of high tide. I stared at him. He smiled and nodded.

"Happens every time," he said.

And it was true. Every single time, somewhere between the years 2032 and 2037, the human race wound up biting the big one. The methods varied, as well as the dates—Jack found that intriguing, even a little hopeful—but in the end, it always came to the one grim realization: we always went kablooie.

The human race was doomed.

By Labor Day, Jack Fitzpatrick was the most scientifically learned man in history. From there he went full-tilt into politics and law. Playing by the rules, knowing when to bend them and when to break them, he graduated top of NYU and Harvard Law Schools no less than eight times. Alternately Working Within The System and molding it to his purpose, he inevitably rose to high-ranking office. He was a chief Presidential advisor six times; he was U.S. Ambassadors to the Soviet Union, China, and Nicaragua; he was governors of the states of New York, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts; he was a justice of the Supreme Court. He did many great and laudable things; he championed the rights of oppressed millions everywhere. He was bold and wise and absolutely incorruptable.

It didn't change a thing. The world



continued to blow up.

In desperation, he became a crusader. He wrote scathing attacks on the Powers that Be, conducting Business as Usual. He organized rallies and marches, tapping into his vastly expanded experience to build strong organizations around his lofty ideals. He actually started making headway: his moving and shaking began being heard clear around the world. In fact, he got so very good at being a mover and a shaker that a new and highly unpleasant pattern emerged.

Jack Fitzpatrick began getting assinated. On a regular basis.

It was an extremely frustrating period in his lives. Every time he'd get a strategy rolling to the point of success, some bastard would blow him off the podium or wire a bomb into his car's ignition or arrange for his chartered plane to crash mysteriously. It wasn't the dying, per se, that bothered him—he'd raced down that black velvet tube so many times that detouring back to the present was no big deal anymore. What bothered him is that he never get to find out what happened. Did his cause succeed? Did his organization endure? Did the world eat it? He had no way of knowing.

So, the next time around Jack tried another tack. He met a man named Carey Hatcher, who had a good heart, a noble bearing and oodles of charisma; he was a born showman, an excellent speaker, and a knock-down drag-out debater who put smarmy simpletons like Ronbo to shame. In fact, the sole thing that Carey Hatcher lacked was the vision that marks a true leader.

Enter Jack: he met Carey in '91, they became friends, and then partners. Jack became the invisible man behind Carey's beautifully-hewn image; together, they went on a human rights campaign that shook everyone from the White House to the Kremlin to the Boys in the Band. They came to symbolize the power of the people: they fought apartheid in South Africa; they quelled the brutal race riots of Boston in '96, they so successfully exposed and embarrassed the Administration on the eve of the covert Guatemalan invasion that far-reaching policies were put forth on the floor of Congress that put real, sharp teeth in the War Powers Act.

By 2011, the popular referendum had Congressman Hatcher aceing the Populist party nomination in the upcoming election, and Jack Fitzpatrick was content in the knowledge that he had never built an organization more sound, more trim, more exquisitely run.

Carey Hatcher received the Nobel Prize posthumously in the year 2012, after his car was forced off of I-81 near Harrisburg, PA, and tumbled down a thirty-five foot embankment. In the resulting scramble for power Jack watched his entire dream turn to shit. He was the Man Who Could Do Anything, but he couldn't bring back the dead, and he couldn't stop the vultures. Or the worms.

For the next thirty years, he made five other successive attempts. All of them ended in death and corruption.

In 2036, we kicked the bucket, once again.

By Halloween, Jack Fitzpatrick was the bitterest man in human history. His dreams had been shattered, again and again and again. Something in him went cold and hard, his humanitarian stance gave way to a sharp-edged and cynical rage. He was tired of getting murdered, tired of putting faith into people who constantly let him down, and tired of knuckling under to the murderous impulses of insensate boobs. His mind took a decidedly militant twist, turned cunning in the worst ways.

He spent his next forty-three lives

WHIMPER

in the service of Death

The first twenty or so went pretty quickly. Wielding Death, he found, was something for which he did not have a natural aptitude. But he got the hang of it, with practice. he bought weapons, went to a clandestine guerrilla training camp in the Everglades, answered ads in Soldier of Fortune *magazine. He became a mercenary, eventually, and from there he went on to participate in some pretty vicious Third World revolutions, stage some reasonably devasting coups and counter-coups, and ultimately came to preside over some rather blood-curdling reigns of terror. Finally, he tapped into Der Führer within us all, and went on to become bona fide Ruler of the World.*

By that time, of course, he found he'd become so bitter and hateful that he destroyed the world himself. In the year 2029, a full three years before anyone else.

In his despair, his thoughts turned to suicide. It only lasted a weekend, but he expended a total of ninety-eight lives from his seemingly inexhaustable reserve. He walked in front of buses, slit his wrists, ODed on smack, leaped off the Brooklyn and Verrazzano bridges, and the Empire State Building; he swallowed both barrels of a Smith and Wesson oover-and-under twelve-gauge pump, guzzled an economy sized Janitor In A Drum, hanged, flayed, filleted and immolated himself, and even fed himself to the lions at the Staten Island Zoo. Ninety-eight ways he fired himself into the nothingness of that long black tube; still, he could not allow himself to go all the way through to the other side. Suicide, for Jack Fitzpatrick, was just not an option.

It was only logical that he should turn, from there, to religion.

He studied them meticulously. He became adept in every major denominational faith, all of the occult sciences and several well-known lost arts. He accepted Jesus Christ as his own personal saviour. He became a whirling dervish. A *brujo*. A bishop. A warlock. He danced, chanted, prayed, swayed, shaved his head, and yodeled like a pilgrim in a Muslim minaret. He hung out with the Sufis, learned how to manipulate their life-sized puppets. It reminded him, in a joyful way, of politics. He sacrificed goats to Ba'al; he became a macrobiotic vegetarian. He trance-channeled with Shirley MacLaine. He chanted *Nam-e Hyo Ho Ren-ge Kyo* till the cows came home; he fasted, witnessed, handled serpents, spoke in tongues, took Erhardt Seminar Training, and lay in sensory deprivation tanks until his skin puckered white.

When he was ready, sometime around Thanksgiving, he went ahead and took one lifetime to become the Spiritual Leader of the World.

They crucified him.

He rose from the shadow, some three days later; just in time to see the mushroom clouds bloom.

Every time he'd get a strategy rolling to the point of success, some bastard would blow him off the podium or wire a bomb into his car's ignition.

And, having risen, knew just what he should do.

By Christmas Eve, Jack Fitzpatrick was the wisest man in the history of the earth. It was only fitting that he made his wisest move.

He became a child again.

Let me explain something. I spent the lion's share of this whole time getting more and more estranged from my friend Jack Fitzpatrick, who was putting on a virtuoso performance as the World's Most Intense Schizophrenic. It was a hard time for *me*, because I really cared about Jack, and I hated watching him switch personalities like a Couch Potato changes channels. But I had problems of my own. It was not the greatest of years for me emotionally, despite the fact that I had sold *my* first novel and was finally able to retire from the messenger biz; I was considerably more secure than Id ever been, but I was still lonely and woman-less and still subconsciously sitting on the edge of Armageddon thinking: *What if it's all for naught?* New-found success will do that to you. And if I'd had any inkling of what Jack knew—that we had another fifty years, give or take a few—I would have putted *my* face shut. But I didn't.

And when he told me, of course, I didn't believe him.

Until early early Christmas morning—4.29 a.m., to be precise—when he proved it to *me*.

"I've got a surprise for you," he said. It was 4.15 a.m., and we were trashed; the previous five hours had been spent at my apartment on West 37th Street, drinking Watney's Red Barrel and arguing passionately about what he called the Truth and I called absolutely fucking insanity.

"Oboy," I moaned, staring out the window of the Checker Cab that bore us down Broadway toward his Thirteenth Street studio. The snow was new and dainty-white, whipping by the window in thick swirls above, muffling the cab's tires below. My mind constrasted this pristine vision with lunatic imaginings of his "surprise": an urban update, perhaps, of Ed Gein's Milwaukee charnel house, complete with a Frigidaire full of viscera and his mother's face soaking in the sink. *What's he gonna show me: a pound of home-made meatloaf and a dried-skin lampshade?* I felt ill.

"No," he said quietly, as if he'd heard my thought. He smiled—a deep, bittersweet smile—and reached into the canvas biker's bag in his lap. He pulled out a rather hastily wrapped package. When he handed it to me, my touch confirmed what *my* eyes suspected: it was a large hardcover book.

I held it motionless for a moment, as the cab took a muted left onto Fourteenth Street and headed toward Second Avenue. "Don't open it quite yet," he said, still smiling that strange smile.

No problem there. Something about the weight of that book, the way it lay in *my* hands, filled me with a sense of awe and dread. I think the meatloaf would have been easier to deal with.

We pulled up to his place at 4:27. I handed the cabbie ten bucks for a four-fifty fare, and we walked in white silence to the door of his building. He turned at the entrance and said, "You can open it now."

"Let's get it out of the snow," I replied. "First thing I want to do is fuck up the cover, right?" He smiled and nodded, we stepped through the front door and paused in the foyer.

I opened the package while he fumbled with his key. Peeling away the bright green and red paper, the first thing that hit *me* was the title. *RENEGADE SAINT—The Secret Lives Of Jacob B. Fitzpatrick.* The second thing I saw was a holographic photoplate of a face. It was a decade plus change older, easily. Careworn, matured, victorious—

but no doubt about it; it was a face I recognized. It was Jack.

I flipped instinctively to the back. There was another plate there, and another face, similarly aged and weathered. It was the author's face.

It was my face.

My mind reeled. I scanned the brief blurbs beneath the picture. According to the blurb, it was my tenth book. According to the blurb, it was already a best-seller.

According to the blurb, so were the other nine.

I looked at Jack, tears in my eyes and a knot in my throat. Jack looked back, that impossible peace and wisdom in his eyes. "It's a good book, man," he said, and nodded. "You've been very good to me, over the centuries. You're the best friend I have. That's why I have to show you this, now."

He opened the door. I followed into the darkened entrance hall, glancing once again at the impossible book, the worlds-within-worlds layered within his face, the publishing date: 2004, Year of Our Lord. Jack flicked on the light at the end of the hall, turned with a flourish, and showed me a thousand futures.

It was staggering. A thousand future histories, meticulously logged and gift-wrapped for posterity. My eyes rolled like minnows in a mudslide as I scanned the sprawling mass of information packing his studio apartment, twelve by twenty-five feet of living space, plus kitchenette and bath. Every square inch of which was crammed with tier upon tier, shelf upon shelf of books, periodicals, video cassettes, laser discs, photo albums, notebooks, and manuscripts. There was some stereo equipment that Japan hasn't even dreamed of yet. A twenty-seven inch color TV that was about as thick as the Weehauken yellow pages. A lot of framed certificates.

But the centerpiece was the computer: a formidable-looking IBM of a type I didn't recognize, humming contentedly beside a four-foot tall rack of the tiniest disks I'd ever seen.

In short, proof.

I stood, starkly and suddenly sober in the face of Jack Fitzpatrick's incontrovertible evidence. Like I said: I was a working writer at that point, squeezing an average of thirty-five hundred words a day out of my little Macintosh word processor. I could double that pace for the rest of my life and not produce a thousandth of what lay before me.

"That's all she wrote, pal," he said softly. "It's all here: a thousand possible futures, all cross-referenced and catalogued. It's all mine,' he added, 'And yours."

I stared at him blankly. "Whu what do you mean, *mine*?"

Again, that secret smile.

"You'll see . . ."

LAST NIGHT JACK FITZPATRICK COMmitted suicide by attacking the President with a fully charged cream pie. It contained no hidden explosives, no poisonous chemicals, no flesh-devouring corrosives. Knowing Jack, it probably didn't even have any preservatives. The President-Elect had just accepted the reigns of power, and was busy spoon-feeding the faithful the same dangerous mixture of pious platitudes and get-tough posturing that had carried the election. Everyone sounded hot and ready to march on down to Central America and kick some Commie butt. The media was out in full regalia, transmuting the event from reality to electron-fodder for the benefit of the folks back home. Jack appeared virtually from out of nowhere, and *splat!* The new President flailed back into the Vice-President, who in turn bumped the First Lady and the Secretary of State into the Second Lady and the Chief Justice, who pitched three members of the Cabinet sprawling and knocked the ex-First Lady clear off the podium and down into the bandshell, where her spindly anorexic legs stuck out of the cacaphonous tangle of Marine Corps bandmembers like a blue-veined victory symbol. The Former President managed to grab hold of the draperies before being bowled over by the Head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who landed whoofing and wheezing squarely atop him, and the pull of their joint impetus managed to bring the bunting crashing down on the entire fiasco like the finale of a Spike Jones road show. Jack was



MONA LIZARD

WHIMPER

clear of the melee and leaping from the stage when . . . BANG!

I'm sure you've seen the pictures.

I was working when it happened. The last three weeks had brought us closer than we'd ever been, largely because he was busy showing me through his archives, sharing memories I haven't even *had* yet. Then, about a week ago, he suddenly dropped out of sight. I was worried, but what could I do? The future's great stuff, but I still had the present to deal with, and books don't write themselves. I left about two dozen increasingly uneasy messages on his machine, and otherwise left it at that.

Until last night.

I sat at my desk, completely unable to work on Chapter Seven of a novel which is already five months behind schedule, shell-shocked in the dawning light of realization. The TV was blasting, hashing and rehashing the details of the attack. In my lap sat the box which came by messenger yesterday morning. Its contents: a photograph, a cryptic note, and a key. The photograph was something he hadn't yet shown me, a shot of myself and some very beautiful girl, waving from a boat in some subtropical locale. The inscription on the back says, *"Honeymoon is great. Don't wish you were here at all ha-ha."* The date is two years hence. The handwriting is mine. The girl is gorgeous, the spitting image of that long-ago, bronze beauty. I may just die.

The note said simply:

GET ON DATANET. RUN FITZ: 12788, PP87, ENTER.

For those of you as yet uninitiated to the halls of the silicon gods, Datanet is one of the many national electronic mail storage and retrieval services. I dialed it up, logged on, typed in the code, and waited.

The screen went blank.

When it blinked back on it asked me a very specific question, to which it wanted a very specific answer. A password.

Q. *If you could to anything, but no one thing is ever going to do it, what would you do?*

I racked my brain, searching for the answer. I searched all night, no doubt while a platoon of police, Secret Service, and federal investigators were simultaneously kicking down the door of Jack's apartment. I finally found the answer at 4:29 this morning. Right there, staring me in the face on page 87 of *Renegade Samt*—the chapter titled "Conundrum." Sly bastard.

Bleary-eyed, I logged on Datanet. Typed in the code. And when those little green letters lit the screen, gave the reply:

A: *I'd do it all.*

The screen blanked momentarily. When it lit up again, it was Jack. I cried as I read it. It said:

SCOTT—

You made it, which means I did it. I decided to go all the way this time. I think that's what might be holding us back: until I go on to the next step, and blow this whole thing wide open, we'll keep going kaboomski.

Am I some kind of kosmic keystone? Or is this just a little kick in the pants from God? I don't know. Forty-five hundred years of cumuletive experience later, and I'm still not qualified to say. I only know it's time to move on.

And that's where you come in: when you punched in the code, it signaled Detanet to send pre-coded letters to every major wire service, newspaper and periodical in the country. TV stations, too. The delivery times are all staggered, as well, so they can compete with each other for primacy. All-sides-against-the-middle time. I won't ba easily explained away.

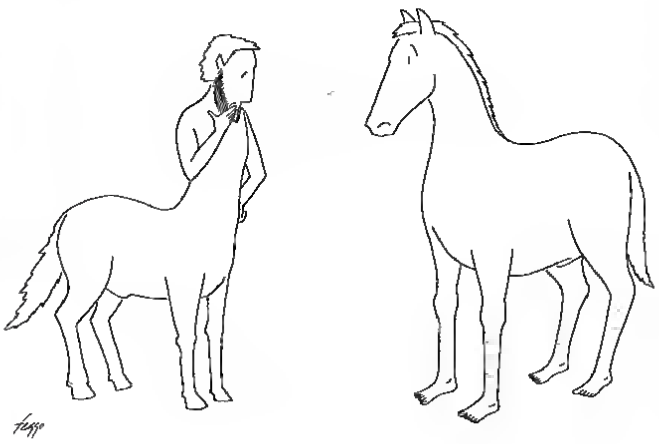
The key is to a safety deposit box at your bank. In it are papers appointing you legal executor of my estate, and a diskette containing the locations of other safety deposit boxes across the city. In them are directions to storage facilities containing duplicates ot every work in my apartment. There's also some stock in companies that are soon going to make you a very rich man. It's all yours, buddy. Use it as you will.

It's funny; after everything is said and done, I still think one of the best times I ever had was that first night with Jamie Morgenstern. Remember her? I even went back and married her, once. Love conquers all, I guess. Life is so strange: we can never to find enough time, and yet we spend so much ot it all caught up in the bullshit. Politics and war, in particular; science and religion can gst pretty loopy *in extremis*, but the first two are by tar the worst. Sometimes I think that laughing those two particular practices right off the tace of the earth might just be Humanity's highest possible achievement.

Oh, well. Gotta go, pal. Good luck. You'll need it.

And thanks.

JACK



WAS HE RIGHT? IS THE WORLD GOING to fry in fifty years? How should I know? Not much reason to expect that it won't, of course; but then, Jack never did *this* before. He may have changed everything with that one final act. And who knows? He may even be right about Humanity's highest possible achievement. You've got to admit, after all . . . the President looked awfully damned silly picking pie off his face. ■

FLOWERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 41

soms: torn branches of crepe myrtle frothing pink and white, drooping tongues of honeysuckle, overblown white roses snipped from a neighbor's yard, chicory fading like a handful of blue stars. She dropped them all at the foot of the bed and then searched the kitchen until she found a dusty wine carafe and some empty jars. Once these were rinsed and filled with water she made a number of unruly bouquets, then placed them all around the puppet, so that its pale head nodded amid a cloud of white and mauve and frail green.

Helen slumped back on the bed, grinning with approval. Bottles trapped the wavering pools of light and cast shimering reflections across the walls. The crepe myrtle sent the palest mauve cloud onto the ceiling, blurring the jungle shadows of the honeysuckle.

Helen's head blurred, as well. She yawned, drowsy from the thick scents of roses, cloying honeysuckle, all the languor of summer nodding in an afternoon. She fell quickly asleep, lulled by the breeze in the stolen garden and the dozy burr of a lost bumblebee.

Once, her sleep broke. A breath of motion against her shoulder—mosquito? spider? centipede?—then a tiny lancing pain, the touch of invisible legs or wings, and it was gone. Helen grimaced, scratched, staggered up and into the bathroom. Her bleary reflection showed a swollen bite on her shoulder. It tingled, and a drop of blood pearled at her touch. She put on a nightshirt, checked her bed for spiders, them tumbled back to sleep.

Much later she woke to a sound once, twice, like the resonant *plank* of a stone tossed into a well. Then a slow melancholy note: another well, a larger stone striking its dark surface. Helen moaned, turning onto her side. Fainter echoes joined these first sounds, plangent tones sweet as rain in the mouth. Her ears rang with this steady pulse, until suddenly she clenched her hands and stiffened, concentrating on the noise.

From wall to ceiling to floor the thrumming echo bounced; grew louder, diminished, droned to a whisper. It did not stop. Helen sat up, bracing herself against the wall, the last shards of sleep fallen from her. Her hand shipped and very slowly she drew it toward her face. It was wet. Between her fingers glistened a web of water, looping like silver twine down her wrist until it was lost in the blue-veined valley of her elbow. Helen shook her head in disbelief and stared up at the ceiling. From one end of the room to the other stretched a filament of water, like a hairline fractured. As she watched, the filament snapped and a single warm drop splashed her temple. Helen swore and slid to the edge of the mattress, then stopped.

At first she thought the vases had fallen to the floor, strewing flowers everywhere. But the bottles remained on the bedstand, their blossoms casting ragged silhouettes in the dark. More flowers were scattered about the bottles: violets, crimson roses, a tendril rampant with tiny fluted petals. Flowers cascaded to the floor, nestled amid folds



of dirty clothes. Helen plucked an orchid from the linoleum, blinking in amazement. Like a wavering pink flame it glowed, the feathery pistils staining her fingertips bright yellow. Absently Helen brushed the pollen onto her thigh, scraping her leg with a hangnail.

That small pain jarred her awake. She dropped the orchid. For the first time it didn't feel like a dream. The room was hot, humid as though moist towels pressed against her face. As she stared at her thigh the bright fingerprint, yellow as a crocus, melted and dissolved as sweat broke on her skin. She stepped forward, the orchid bursting beneath her heel like a ripe grape. A sickly smell rose from the broken flower. Each breath she took was heavy, as with rain, and she choked. The rims of her nostrils were wet. She sneezed, inhaling warm water. Water streamed down her cheeks and she drew her hand slowly upward, to brush the water from her eyes. She could move it no further than her lap. She looked down, silently mouthing bewilderment as she shook her head.

Another hand grasped her wrist, a hand delicate and limp as a cut iris wand, so small that she scarcely felt its touch upon her pulse. Inside her skull the blood thrummed counterpoint to the *gamelan*, gongs echoing the throb and beat of her heart. The little hand disappeared. Helen staggered backward onto the bed, frantically scrambling for the light switch. In the darkness, something crept across the rippling bedsheets.

When she screamed her mouth was stuffed with roses, orchids, the corner of her pillowcase. Tiny hands pinched her nostrils shut and forced more flowers between her lips until she lay still, gagging on aromatic petals. From the rumpled bedclothes reared a shadow, child-size, grinning. Livid shoots of green and yellow encircled its spindly arms and the sheets whispered like rain as it crawled towards her. Like a great mantis it dragged itself forward on its long arms, the rough cloth of its robe catching between her knees, its white teeth glittering. She clawed through the sheets, trying to dash it against the wall. But she could not move. Flowers spilled from her mouth when she tried to scream, soft fingers of orchids sliding down her throat as she flailed at the bedclothes.

And the clanging of the gongs did not cease: not when the tiny hands pattered over her breasts, not when the tiny mouth hissed in her ear. Needle teeth pierced her shoulder as a long tongue unfurled and lapped there, flicking blood onto the blosoms wreathed about her neck. Only when the slender shadow withdrew and the terrible, terrible dreams began did the *gamelans* grow silent.

Nine thirty came, long after Helen usually met Leo in the cafeteria. He waited, drinking an entire pot of coffee before he gave up and wandered downstairs, piqued that she hadn't shown up for breakfast.

In the same narrow hallway behind the Malaysian artifacts he discovered her, crouched over a pair of tapered wooden crates. For a long moment he watched her, and almost turned back without saying anything. Her hair was dirty, twisted into a sloppy bun, and the hunch of her shoulders hinted at exhaustion. But before he could leave, she turned to face him, clutching the boxes to her chest.

"Rough night?" croaked Leo. A scarf tied around her neck didn't hide the bruises there. Her mouth was swollen, her eyes soft and shadowed with sleeplessness. He knew she must see people, men, boyfriends. But she had never mentioned anyone, never spoke of weekend trips or vacations.

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Suddenly he felt betrayed, and spun away to leave.

"Leo," murmured Helen, absently stroking the carte. "I can't talk right now. I got in so late. I'm kind of busy."

"I guess so." He laughed uncertainly, but stopped before turning the corner to see her pry open the lid of the box, head bent so that he could not tell what it was she found inside.

A week passed. Leo refused to call her. He timed his forays to the cafeteria to avoid meeting her there. He left work late so he wouldn't see her in the elevator. Every day he expected to see her at his desk, find a telephone message scrawled on his memo pad. But she never appeared.

Another week went by. Leo ran into the curator for Indo-Asian Studies by the elevator.

"Have you seen Helen this week?" she asked, and Leo actually blushed at mention of her name.

"No," he mumbled. "Not for awhile, really."

"Guess she's sick." The curator shrugged and stepped onto the elevator. Leo rode all the way down to the basement and roamed the corridors for an hour, dropping by the Anthropology office. No Helen, no messages from her at the desk.

He wandered back down the hall, pausing in the corridor where he had last seen her. A row of boxes had collapsed and he kicked at the cartons, idly knelt and read the names on the packing crates as if they held a clue to Helen's sudden change. Labels in Sanskrit, Vietnamese, Chinese, English, crumbling beside baggage labels and exotic postage stamps and scrawled descriptions of contents. WAJANG GOLEH, he read. Beneath was scribbled PUPPETS. He squatted on the floor, staring at the bank of crates, then half-heartedly started to read each label. Maybe she'd find him there. Perhaps she'd been sick, had a doctor's appointment. She might be late again.

A long box rattled when he sifted it. KRIS, read the label, and he peeked inside to find an ornate sword. A heavier box bore the legend SANGHYANG SPIRIT PUPPET. And another that seemed to be empty, embellished with a flowing script: SEKAR MAS, and the clumsy translation PRINCE OF FLOWERS.

He slammed the last box against the wall and heard the dull creak of splintering wood. She would not be in today. She hadn't been in for two weeks.

That night he called her.

"Hello?"

Helen's voice, at least a man hadn't answered.

"Helen. How you doing? It's Leo."

"Leo." She coughed and he heard someone in the background. "It's you."

"Right," he said dryly, then waited for an apology, her embarrassed laugh, another cough that would be followed by an invented catalogue of hayfever, colds, flu. But she said nothing. He listened carefully and realized it wasn't a voice he had heard in the background but a constant stir of sound, like a fan, or running water. "Helen? You okay?"

A long pause. "Sure. Sure. I'm okay." Her voice faded and he heard a high, piping note.

"You got a bird, Helen?"

"What?"

He shifted the phone to his other ear, shoving it closer to his head so he could hear better. "A bird. There's this funny voice, it sounds like you got a bird or something."

"No," replied Helen slowly. "I don't have a bird. There's nothing wrong with my phone." He could hear her moving around her apartment, the background noises rising and falling but never silent. "Leo, I can't talk now. I'll see you tomorrow, okay?"

"Tomorrow?" he exploded. "I haven't seen you in two weeks!"

She coughed and said, "Well, I'm sorry. I've been busy. I'll see you tomorrow. Bye."

He started to argue, but the phone was already dead.

She didn't come in the next day. At three o'clock he went to the Anthropology Department and asked the secretary if Helen had been in that morning.

"No," she answered, shaking her head. "And they've got her down as AWOL. She hasn't been in all week." She hesitated before whispering. "Leo, she hasn't looked very good lately. You think maybe ..." Her voice died and she shrugged, "Who knows," and turned



to answer the phone.

He left work early, walking his bicycle up the garage ramp and wheeling it to the right, toward Helen's neighborhood. He was fuming, but a sliver of fear had worked its way through his anger. He had almost gone to her supervisor, almost phoned Helen first. Instead he pedalled quickly down Pennsylvania Avenue, skirting the first lanes of rush hour traffic. Union Station loomed a few blocks ahead. He recalled an article in yesterday's *Post*: vandals had destroyed the rose garden in front of the station. He detoured through the bus lane that circled the building and skimmed around the desecrated garden, shaking his head and staring back in dismay. All the roses gone. Someone had lopped each bloom from its stem. In spots the cobblestones were littered with mounds of blossoms, brown with decay. Here and there dead flowers still dangled from hacked stems. Swearing in disgust, Leo made a final loop, nearly skidding into a bus as he looked back at the plundered garden. Then he headed toward Helen's apartment building a few blocks north.

Her windows were dark. Even from the street the curtains looked filthy, as though dirt and exhaust had matted them to the glass. Leo stood on the curb and stared at the blank eyes of each apartment window, gaping in the stark concrete façade.

Who would want to live here? he thought, ashamed. He should have come sooner. Shame froze into apprehension and the faintest icy sheath of fear. Hurriedly he locked his bike to a parking meter and approached her window, standing on tiptoe to peer inside. Nothing. The discolored curtains hid the rooms from him like clouds of ivory smoke. He tapped once, tentatively; then, emboldened by silence, rapped for several minutes, squinting to see any movement inside.

Still nothing. Leo swore out loud and slung his hands into his pockets, wondering lamely what to do. Call the police? Next of kin? He winced at the thought, as if she couldn't do that herself. Helen had always made it clear that she enjoyed being on her own. But the broken glass beneath his sneakers, windblown newspapers tugging at the bottom steps, the whole unkempt neighborhood denied that. Why here? he thought angrily, and then he was taking the steps two at a time, kicking bottles and burger wrappers out of his path.

He waited by the door for five minutes before a teenage boy ran out. Leo barely caught the door before it slammed behind him. Inside, a fluorescent light hung askew from the ceiling, buzzing like a wasp. Helen's was the first door to the right. Circulars from convenience stores drifted on the floor, and on the far wall was a bank of mailboxes. One was ajar, stuffed with unclaimed bills and magazines. More envelopes piled on the steps. Each bore Helen's name.

His knocking went unanswered, but he thought he heard someone moving inside.

"Helen," he called softly. "It's Leo. You okay?"

He knocked harder, called her name, finally pounded with both fists.



Still nothing. He should leave; he should call the police. Better still, forget ever coming here. But he was here, now; the police would question him no matter what; the curator for Indo-Asian Studies would look at him askance. Leo bit his lip and tested the doorknob. Locked, but the wood gave way slightly as he leaned against it. He rattled the knob and braced himself to kick the door in.

He didn't have to. In his hand the knob twisted and the door swung inwards, so abruptly that he fell inside. The door banged shut behind him. He glanced across the room, looking for her, but all he saw was gray light, the gauzy shadows cast by gritty curtains. Then he breathed in, gagging, and pulled his sleeve to his mouth until he gasped through the cotton. He backed toward the door, slipping on something dank, like piles of wet clothing. He glanced at his feet and grunted in disgust.

Roses. They were everywhere: heaps of rotting flowers, broken branches, leaves stripped from bushes, an entire small ficus tree tossed into the corner. He forgot Helen, turned to grab the doorknob and tripped on an uprooted azalea. He fell, clawing at the wall to balance himself. His palms splayed against the plaster and slid as though the surface was still wet. Then, staring upward, he saw that it *was* wet. Water streamed from the ceiling, flowing down the wall to soak his shirt cuffs. Leo moaned. His knees buckled as he sank, arms flailing, into the mass of decaying blossoms. Their stench suffocated him; his eyes watered as he retched and tried to stagger back to his feet.

Then he heard something, like a bell, or a telephone, then another faint sound, like an animal scratching overhead. Carefully he twisted to stare upwards, trying not to betray himself by moving too fast. Something skittered across the ceiling, and Leo's stomach turned dizzily. What could be up there? A second blur dashed to join the first, golden eyes stared down at him, unblinking.

Geckos, he thought frantically. She had pet geckos. She *has* pet geckos. Jesus.

She couldn't be here. It was too hot, the stench horrible: putrid water, decaying plants, water everywhere. His trousers were soaked from where he had fallen, his knees ached from kneeling in a trough of water pooling against the wall. The floor had warped and more flowers protruded from cracks between the linoleum: brown fronds of iris and rotting honeysuckle. From another room trickled the sound of water dripping steadily, as though a tap was running.

He had to get out. He'd leave the door open—police, a landlord. Someone would call for help. But he couldn't reach the door. He couldn't stand. His feet skated across the slick tiles as his hands tore uselessly through wads of petals. It grew darker. Golden bands rippled across the floor as sunlight filtered through the gray curtains. Leo dragged himself through rotting leaves, his clothes sopping, tugging aside mats of greenery and broken branches. His leg ached where he'd fallen on it and his hands stung, pricked by unseen thorns.

Something brushed against his fingers and he forced himself to look down, shuddering. A shattered nautilus left a thin red line across his hand, the sharp fragments gilded by the dying light. As he looked around he noticed other things, myriad small objects caught in the morass of rotting flowers like a nightmarish ebb tide on the linoleum floor. Agates and feathered masks; bird of paradise plumes encrusted with mud; cracked skulls and bones and cloth of gold. He recognized the carved puppet Helen had been playing with

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that afternoon in the Indonesian corridor, its headdress glittering in the twilight. About its neck was strung a plait of flowers, amber and cerulean blossoms glowing like phosphorescence among the ruins.

Through the room echoed a dull clang. Leo jerked to his knees, relieved. Surely someone had knocked? But the sound came from somewhere behind him, and was echoed in another, harsher, note. As this second bell died he heard the geckos' feet pattering as they fled across the ceiling. A louder note rang out, the windowpanes vibrating to the sound as though wind-battered. In the corner the leaves of the ficus turned as if to welcome rain, and the rose-bushes stirred.

Leo heard something else, then, a small sound like a cat stretching to wakefulness. Now both of his legs ached, and he had to pull himself forward on his hands and elbows, striving to reach the front door. The clanging grew louder, more resonant. A higher tone echoed it monotonously, like the echo of rain in a well. Leo glanced over his shoulder to the empty doorway that led to the kitchen, the dark mouth of the hallway to Helen's bedroom. Something moved there.

At his elbow moved something else and he struck at it feebly, knocking the puppet across the floor. Uncomprehending, he stared after it, then cowered as he watched the ceiling, wondering if one of the geckos had crept down beside him.

There was no gecko. When Leo glanced back at the puppet it was moving across the floor toward him, pulling itself forward on its long slender arms.

The gongs thundered now. A shape humped across the room, something large enough to blot out the empty doorway behind it. Before he was blinded by petals, Leo saw that it was a shrunken figure, a woman whose elongated arms clutched broken branches to propel herself, legs dragging uselessly through the tangled leaves. About her swayed a host of brilliant figures no bigger than dolls. They had roped her neck and hands with wreaths of flowers and scattered blossoms onto the floor about them. Like a flock of chattering butterflies they surged toward him, tiny hands outstretched, their long tongues unfurling like crimson pistils, and the gongs rang like golden bells as they gathered about him to feed. ■

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granddaughter would like to dance."

He walked to each corner of the stage and extinguished the torches, in the moonlight, the shards from the smashed vial glimmered like stars reflected in the depths of a well.

Then Magenta stepped onto the stage. She was a tiny girl, her limbs frail as matchsticks, with long hair the color of coal and round, hungry eyes as deep and mysterious as the jungle looking out of a face as pale and placid as stone. I felt as though her eyes would devour me if I

Magenta was tiny, her limbs frail as matchsticks, with long hair the color of coal and round, hungry eyes as deep and mysterious as the jungle.

stared too long, but I couldn't look away, curious to plumb their depths. Her dress hung loose, dwarfing her body in white folds that seemed to radiate a faint light of their own, like woven moonbeams.

Suddenly the tinny clash of cymbals and the rattle of tambourines rose from the wagon behind her. The strings of a guitar were struck, the chord crashing in the air then bending around Magenta as if warped by the heat. She launched into her dance, moving slowly at first, then with greater speed and complexity, until it made me dizzy to watch. As she spun, hair flying, her dress whipping high above her knees, all the light seemed to spiral inward to her eyes, kindling them with a flickering, ghostly fire, though her pale features remained expressionless as ever.

People in the crowd began to hurl coins into the sombrero, but these were snatched by a sudden whirlwind and flung through the air in a crazy dance of their own, some even shooting back at us as if thrown by an invisible hand. In the confusion, as people yelled and ducked for cover, I saw Magenta tread upon the shards of glass from the vial Cesar had smashed. Through her feet were bare they were not bloodied, it almost appeared that she was floating ever so slightly above the stage, raised by the wind she had spun into being.

Then all at once there came a blinding flash of light accompanied by a sulfurous smell that made me cough and my eyes water. When my vision finally cleared, Magenta was gone. The torches were lit again, and Cesar was calmly picking up the sombrero, jingling the coins inside. I looked around, everyone else appeared as dazed as I, blinking in confusion as if unable to decide whether they were just emerging from a dream or sinking into one. I wasn't sure myself.

'My friends," Cesar said, that same gracious smile frozen on his face, "thank you for your generosity. But I'm afraid you must excuse me now. I go to prepare the elixir according to the instructions of the Sainted Virgin. Tomorrow morning, for a modest fee, I will have the honor of offering you health and immortality! Until then, I bid you goodnight."

He turned to go, but before he could enter the wagon Captain Ramiro Benitez appeared out of nowhere, clambering weakly onto the stage and calling for him to halt in the name of the law. Cesar, with the ironic deference all gypsies seem to instinctively show men in uniform, stepped back and offered a low bow.

The captain seemed nervous, shivering with a malarial chill in the dense nighttime heat. "I'm told you are the leader here," he said.

Cesar shrugged, smiling agreeably. "Why wasn't I informed of your arrival? It's your duty to register with me, my friend." He presented his hand crisply. "Your papers."

'Of course, Captain. A simple oversight." Cesar drew a thick bundle of papers from a pocket in his cape and placed them in the captain's outstretched palm.

Captain Benitez examined the papers. The shivers wracking his body worsened as he read, whether from rage or the malaria no one could tell. Meanwhile, the crowd milled noisily, shouting for him to step down. Suddenly the captain tensed, his finger pouncing like a jaguar. "What is this authorizing signature?'

Cesar bent over the page. "That is the signature of the Minister of Internal Affairs.'

"What do you take me for? The Minister is Porfiro Velazquez, not this man. You're under arrest.'

'Excuse me, captain," said Cesar. "But Porfiro Velazquez was assassinated three years ago."

The captain sagged visibly at this information, then squared his shoulders.

"You're lying, gypsy."

'I assure you I'm not. Why don't you radio your superiors?"

The fact was, as everyone knew, the garrison's radio had long ago rusted away to nothing.

"Don't tell me who to radio!" the captain thundered. "I'm going to close you down!"

'Come on, Captain," someone shouted. "Forget about your uniform for onre."

"Who cares about some damn signature?' demanded someone else.

Captain Ramiro Benitez was even more outraged by these outbursts. He scanned the crowd for his men, who were with their wives and children in the back, trying to avoid his gaze. "Jose, Alvaro, Eusebio, Quito,' he ticked off mercilessly. "Juan, Lupe, Ixca, Carlos, Artemio, Gervasio!"

Grumbling to each other and scowling, the men shuffled forward.

'Men!" Captain Benitez shouted. "Disperse these people!"

The men hesitated as though they had been ordered to betray themselves. In a paroxysm of rage, Captain Benitez drew his revolver.

'Don't shoot us, Captain," cried a drunken voice. "We'll go peacefully!"

Everyone cracked up. We sympathized with the ten men; after all, they had long ago reased to be soldiers. They were our neighbors now, our relatives. No one wanted to give them a hard time, regardless of how we felt about the captain.

I RAN STRAIGHT HOME. GRANDFATHER WAS sitting up in his dark room, waiting. I lit a candle and sat beside him. "Grandfather, I wish you could have seen it!"

I told him about Cesar, how he had juggled knives as though they were lighter than air and how in a fit of anger Captain Ramiro Benitez had shut the gypsies down. I was saving the best for last, but before I could mention Magenta's dance, Grandfather laughed and mussed my hair.

"Good job, Pablito," he said. "You are a good son."

The excitement of seeing the gypsies had all but pushed the demands of vengeance from my mind. Only now did I remember why Grandfather had wanted me to keep my eyes open. Ashamed, I listened to him describe the murder of Captain Ramiro Benitez.

Over the years, Grandfather had studied the captain's movements until he knew exactly where he would be at each moment. His nights began in the bountiful arms of one or more of the local whores, but by two or three in the morning he invariably staggered into the street, held upright by some homing instinct triggered by the prodigious amounts of rum he'd consumed, and set off for his bed as though wading through molasses, collapsing there until at least noon.

Grandfather spoke softly, in a rush. "In an hour or two, when everyone is asleep, I want you to take a knife from the kitchen, a long and sharp knife, and sneak into the captain's house. When he comes back and passes out, cut his throat just like a pig's. Then clean the knife on the sheets and bring it back here. Don't let anyone see you. Understand?"

"No . . ." Part of me was still thinking like a child, and murder was men's business.

"Don't worry, you'll be safe. Everyone will assume the gypsy did it. They all saw his skill with knives, his argument with the captain."

At last I understood. The silver earring in my pocket grew heavy as blood money. "Please, Grandfather. There has to be another way. I'll kill the captain, just leave Cesar alone."

Grandfather was furious. "Coward, is this how you honor your father, by throwing your own life away?" His palm stung my ear and I swallowed a sob. "The life of one gypsy is a small price to pay for vengeance!"

'But the gypsies saved your life!"

"That was long ago, and the debt I owe my son cancels all others—just like the debt you owe your father. No one said it was easy being a man, grandson. We do what we have to, not what we want."

I took the knife from the kitchen and hung it beneath my shirt on a string. Now that the moment I'd spent my whole life preparing for had arrived, things didn't seem so simple anymore. I asked Cesar to forgive me.

But as I lay in bed, waiting for time to pass, I realized that I couldn't let Cesar take the blame for my actions no matter what Grandfather said. If I warned him of what I was going to do, he would be able to get away in time. Maybe that would make things more dangerous for me; I didn't care. I was proud of the murder I was about to commit. Captain Ramiro Benitez deserved to die; Grandfather was right about that, I knew.

I slipped out my window and made my way to the plaza, sticking to the



"Miss Hutchings, I sense a disturbance in the force . . . check it out."

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shadows. The streets were empty, the gypsies' wagons shut up tight. The only sound was the whickering of the horses in the corral. It was hard to believe that just hours ago the whole town had been hopping, that was another one I owed the captain.

I crept up to Cesar's wagon. In the moonlight it loomed vast and ill-defined, its edges sinking into shadow, its bright paint peeling, the colors washed out. I was not afraid, I was filled with a consciousness of the nobility of my mission, already imagining Cesar's effusive gratitude, which I would accept with an heroic dignity worthy of my father.

I raised my fist to knock, but before I could complete the action the door swung open and a huge hand shot out to grasp my own. Before I knew it, I was being pulled inside, too startled to fight or scream. The door slammed shut behind me.

"What do we have here, I wonder? A thief or a spy?"

It was Cesar, his face like cracked, yellowed parchment in the unsteady light of the candles that swung in a brass lamp from the ceiling behind him in the center of the wagon. His eyes were red as the cape he had worn. His fist still engulfed my own, squeezing with a pressure that forced me to my knees. I shook my head no, unable to find my voice.

"Better state your business fast, son," he said, keeping the pressure mounting until I thought my hand would break.

I stuttered, my heart hammering in my chest so loudly that I couldn't get my thoughts straight. I looked past Cesar, glimpsing glass vials filled with a colorful array of liquids and powders below a hopeless tangle of coiled rubber tubing all set on a table in the center of the wagon. A vaguely metallic taste scraped the back of my tongue. Of course—he thought I had come to steal the elixir! And then, in one corner, I caught sight of the pale curve of Magenta's profile.

"Oh, so that's it," Cesar said, following my eyes. "Don't you think you're a little young for my granddaughter, son?"

Now Magenta spoke from the shadows, unmoving. "Let the boy go, Cesar."

Her voice seemed only inches from my ear. I jumped at the impossible nearness of it. It was a beautiful voice, yet there was no warmth in it, her tone was smooth and cold as ice, delicately sculptured but strong as steel. Cesar released me at once, as if accustomed to obeying that voice without a thought. I got to my feet, flexing my sore hand. Cesar's red eyes were on me, glittering with a malice that chilled my heart. Then I remembered the silver earring he had given me. I pulled it out of my pocket and held it up where he could see it. "Look, you can trust me," I began shakily. "I've come to warn you . . ." And then I told him everything, holding nothing back, not even Grandfather's plan to frame him for the murder of Captain Benitez. But when I had finished, he seemed unmoved; I wondered if he had heard a single word.

"I know who you are and why you've come," he said, his voice as full of hate as his eyes. I had the impression

Her words rang not in my ears but in my head. I felt the chill of her presence all around me, yet when I turned, my knife held ready, I saw I was alone.

that his yellow skin was hardening before my eyes, that pieces of flesh would soon crack off and drop away, exposing the skull beneath. I looked on in horror.

"You've come to take my place, to take care of her!" he continued like a madman. He took a step toward me, hands outstretched.

"Cesar!"

Again Magenta's voice rang out. Cesar froze, trembling. I looked past him. Magenta was half out of the shadows, gazing at me with eyes that still retained a glimmer of the moonlight they had swallowed in the dance. I gave a strangled cry and backed away. She was not a young girl. She was an ancient, withered girl, her youth mummified and shrunken, the skin of her face so pale and shining in the soft glow of her eyes that her features seemed carved from polished bone. The face we had seen on stage must have been a mask, heavily made up. I turned and wrenched the door open, then ran as if my life depended on it, Cesar's mocking laughter licking my heels like fire.

I wanted to run all the way home, dive into bed and huddle under the covers, wake up in the morning and tell myself that it had all been a bad dream. Instead, I forced myself to stop. I waited to catch my breath, then made my way to the house of Captain Ramiro Benitez. If Cesar was arrested for my crime now, I told myself, so much the better. I tried to forget what I had seen and heard, concentrating on the job ahead.

I slipped into the captain's house through an open window. It was dark, difficult to see. I moved slowly, my hands before me. Then I heard a rattling snore. I followed it to the bedroom. Enough moonlight fell through the window to give me a dim view.

Captain Ramiro Benitez lay on his back on the bed, still wearing his uniform. It was filthy now, stained and missing some buttons. The room reeked of rum. Plainly, he'd been celebrating.

His scrawny neck was a sickly yellow color, stretched across the pillow like a chicken's on the block. There was no anger in me, no thirst for retribution, just the blunt prodding of what had to be done. I drew the knife from beneath my shirt and laid its edge against the captain's throat. He snored on, unaware of how impatiently death crouched above him, how beautifully it shone in the moonlight where I grasped it in my hand.

What was he dreaming of, I found myself wondering, in these, the final seconds of his life? A childhood somewhere, loving parents, loyal friends? All the women he had known and perhaps loved, perhaps hated, all the men he had killed? Was he dreaming of my father, reliving the arrest, the trip back over the mountains, the execution in the capital, wondering why he had ended up here after all those years, what the hell had gone wrong with his career, with his whole damned life? I looked at him, the skin of his face pinched by the malaria into that of a man three times his age, a living corpse, and suddenly knew that for all my hate I couldn't kill him, not even if I had been as blind as Grandfather.

It wasn't that I feared the feel of flesh parting like butter beneath the blade, the thin mouth I carved first vomiting then drooling blood; I'd seen all that before, had myself cut the throats of pigs and cattle. It wasn't that he was a human being or didn't deserve to die; if Grandfather had materialized beside me I would have given him the knife, even guided his hand. Maybe it was a weakness in me, maybe I was a bad son. But after all those years spent rehearsing for this

moment, I simply couldn't do it. I wished I could. We do what we have to, not what we want. Those words of Grandfather's came back to me, but just the same I knew he wouldn't understand. I didn't really understand, myself. What could I say to him now? In his anger, he might easily kill me, or himself.

It's always hard the first time.

I recognized Magenta's voice. Her words rang not in my ears but within my head, as though I had thought them. They were accompanied by a cold so intense and permeating that my heartbeat slowed and my emotions deadened, though my senses seemed to crystallize, even sharpen. I felt the chill of her presence all around me; yet when I turned, searching the dark corners of the room, my knife held ready, I saw that I was alone. Her laughter pricked me, sharp and brittle as needles of ice.

"Where are you?" I called out. "What do you want?"

Shh. We don't want to wake the captain, do we? Your thoughts are loud enough for me to hear.

What do you want? I repeated silently, my eyes on the captain, who was still snoring; it would take more than a few words from me to wake him.

That's better. I want to help you, Pablito.

How do you know my name? How are we doing this? The Virgin Mary?

I shivered with her laughter. *My secrets come from across the ocean, across the centuries. All that talk about the Sainted Virgin and moonlight and sweat is just to fool people.*

Then what are you?

Instead of answering, she asked a question of her own. *You hate that man with all your heart, yet you spare his life. What will your grandfather say?*

I looked down at the knife in my hand, unable to reply.

I'll tell you, Pablito. He will call you a coward. His proud heart will not be able to bear the shame. By letting this worthless man live, you will be killing your grandfather. I can understand your reluctance to kill a man in order to avenge a man you never knew—your father—but it's your grandfather's life I'm talking about now. Can you condemn him through inaction?

I had never considered that. She was right. And yet I couldn't kill the captain as he lay there in his drunken stupor, defenseless, already more dead than alive, not even if it meant Grandfather's death. I guess that made me a coward. Revulsion and shame crawled through me as if called forth by Magenta's voice. I wanted to stab myself with the knife, but I was too much of a coward even for that.

Let me kill him then.

Her words gave me fresh hope, though I could scarcely bring myself to believe them. *Why should you help me?*

Maybe because I met your father years ago over the mountains and believe in what he died for. Or maybe because I can't keep Cesar alive much longer to watch over me while I sleep, and I need someone to take his place.

"You knew my father? What was he like?" In my excitement, I spoke aloud.

Shh. He was a brave man who murdered something precious in himself with each man he killed, even the ones that deserved to die. He was dead inside long before they killed him, but they killed him anyway. I'm sure he appreciated the joke.

I don't understand.

You're too young, Pablito.

That's what Grandfather always used to say.

I helped your grandfather ninety-five years ago, your father a few years after that. Now I'm offering you my help. Will you come away with me tonight if I kill this man? Will you take Cesar's place, wear the silver earring I made him give you? We'll go into the jungle, find the guerrillas. And when we come out again, in five years or five hundred, we'll be leading an army.

As I listened to her words, I had the feeling that Magenta already knew what my answer would be, that she had always known. But I was just discovering it for myself. For the first time in my life, I had a sense of why my father had crossed the mountains in search of his fate instead of waiting sensibly for it to come to him like everybody else. Though I would be going in the opposite direction, I believe he would have understood. *Yes*, I thought. *Yes.*

And there she was suddenly, stepping out of the moonlight as if she'd been hiding there all along, transparent as glass. Her appearance no longer terrified me; instead, I felt almost transfixed by her strange beauty, the face and body of a child aged beyond the grasp of time into something pure and eternal. I offered her the knife, but she shook her head with a smile as she stood on tiptoe and bent over the sleeping form of Captain Ramiro Benitez like a little girl kissing her father goodnight. ■



MILLENNIUM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 61

rectify their errors. Nothing is beyond comprehension.

Further, the concepts combine in broader social terms. New Agers are actively "creating reality" by choosing to believe in and promote the New Age. Obviously, if enough people accept these beliefs, then—at least culturally—the New Age will indeed be here.

A Touch of Magic

Of course, there are plenty of *other* mystical philosophies available to disenchanted Yuppies and Boomers, many far more closely reasoned than the New Age. But often they're demanding ascetic theologies without the pageantry or promised rewards of religion. The New Age offers more than a cozy explanation for the purpose of life. The New Age offers active, working magic.

New Age thought explains, or at least allows for, a wide range of psychic phenomena, sorcery, occults, and supernatural powers. Or, to non-believers, a wide range of fraud, parlor tricks, charlatanism, and chicanery. Some of these activities are mere fads—but it's the New Agers' magic that's capturing wide interest, making money, and spreading the underlying New Age message.



The acceptance of magic and the occult is a two-edged blade. It leaves the New Age vulnerable to ridicule and scandal—even ardent followers acknowledge increases in misguidance and deliberate fraud. But for the moment, entities and psychics are bringing in converts and spurring the movement.

Perhaps we need, right now, to believe in benevolent magic. Perhaps spirit guides, earth-energy, wishing makes it so, and Atlantean lore can help us through the remaining years to the promised New Age—and the certain millennium. As with the historical justification for promoting a religious New Age—perhaps hope is better than hopelessness.

Given the alternatives, perhaps believing in magic's not such a bad idea.

(Marie A. Waldridge, Maxine Skuba, Maryellen Burdwood, Terri Windling, and Tappan King assisted in the research for this article.) ■

THE NEW, IMPROVED NEW AGE

Sixties survivors might be wondering twenty years ago there was a widespread "counterculture" movement called the New Age, which had little or nothing to do with past lives or ghostly guides from astral planes. Are the names co-incidence? Or is today's New Age "the maturing of the hippie movement" as University of Denver Professor of Religious Studies Carl A. Raschke believes?

Actually, the phrase "New Age" is far older than that. It's rooted in the occult, first popularized by Nineteenth Century spiritualist Helena Blavatsky (although Mme. Blavatsky thought "the coming New Age" would be led by her mystical Theosophical Society). Later, the term was redefined by notorious magician Aleister Crowley, who believed that, every two thousand years, astrological changes signalled watershed periods in world culture, marked by the emergence of new consciousness and new gods or messiahs; the Christian/Hindu/Buddhist age, symbolized by the zodiac sign Pisces, would, around the year two thousand, shift into an era symbolized by Aquarius.

The sixties baby boomers, an impatient lot, refused to wait: the 1967 musical *Hair* announced the dawning of "The Age of Aquarius." At least thirty years premature; but millions were certain the Peace-Love vibes of Flower Power would last forever, transforming the world. That "New Age" movement stood for wholesale experimenting in social alternatives: communes; urban crash pads, free health and food clinics; organic foods; psychedelic drugs; Transcendental Meditation, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, *I Ching*, and the Tarot as guides to living. Mysticism was only part of an attempt to create a society without authority or boundaries, based on the synergistic premise that people, given freedom, would help each other build an enlightened, humane world.

The communes faltered and love failed to conquer all. So 1970s New Age advocates began to seek a "holistic" (integrated) philosophy of body/spirit/mind/environment, but the movement drifted apart into factions, linked primarily through the magazines *EastWest Journal*, *New Age Journal*, and *Co-Evolution*. The spiritually inclined turned to Sufi, Ba'hai, Buddhism, shamanism, mystic-organic communities (like Britain's Findhorn) or, more often, to retreats with charismatic gurus (notably the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Guru Maharaj Ji, Sri Chimoy, and the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh). The global-scientific minded championed, through Greenpeace and the New Alchemists, earth-consciousness and "appropriate" (ecologically gentle) technologies. But during the "Me Decade," the most popular branch of the New Age was the study of altered consciousness that became the Human Potential Movement—a plethora of often short-lived therapies (many developed at California's Esalen Institute) that included Gestalt therapy, Primal Screaming, rolfing, sensory deprivation, alpha-rhythm control, and est; combined with diet, health and exercise fads, martial arts, and alternative medicine.

By the beginning of this decade, the New Age remnants appeared, from a popular viewpoint, to be fading, foundering amid scandal, disinterest, or lack of results. In retrospect, it seems the branches were about to re-unite. Scientific discoveries (from Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's investigation of near-death experience to new hypotheses in quantum and cosmological physics) seemed to validate some metaphysical ideas. Human potential psychologists found their theories increasingly coming to parallel spiritual thought. And mystics, rejecting leaders and retreats that repeatedly tended to degenerate into cults, returned to society, seeking revelation through self-examination.

All three factions were used to unusual, esoteric concepts and open to cross-pollination and new ideas. Some of those dedicated to the sixties and seventies versions of the New Age protested the supernatural interests, simplified theology, and lack of overt social activism that characterize today's New Age. Many others, though, saw spirituality as the natural direction of the movement from the beginning. So, what began as social experiment has become occult religion, coming full circle to what "New Age" meant a hundred years ago.

—Mark Arnold

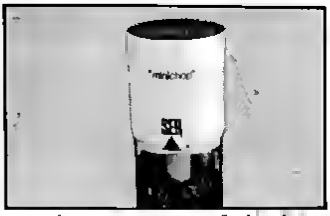
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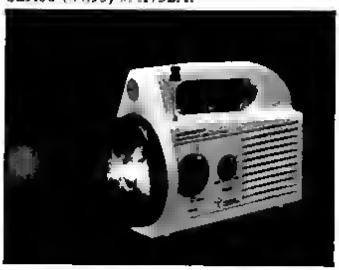
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SCREEN

by Gahan Wilson

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a celluloid comic book!

Robocop (Orion)
The Lost Boys (Warner Bros.)
Superman IV (Cannon)
Masters of the Universe (Cannon)



***BLOODY GOOD: Peter Weller in the gory-but-fun* Robocop.**

PHOTO © 1987 ORION PICTURES CORP

UNDERSTAND, I *LOVE* COMIC BOOKS, always have, probably always will. *Captain Marvel* was my particular favorite. It was doubtless the idea that this kind of wimpy little kid, Billy Batson, could say "SHAZAM!" and an art deco lightning bolt would come down and—hey! *—no more wimpy kid school bullies, so watch your asses!*

I was so addicted to Captain Marvel I arranged to have his magazines sent to me at summer camp (that was probably one of the reasons I agreed to go to summer camp) and I, like all comic book lovers, have the tale to tell of the Great Stash. I had a barrellful of classics, folks, I swear it to God, a literal barrelful. Stuff that would pull enough to buy a car you would be proud of, all tucked away safely—or so I thought—in a corner of the basement locker for our apartment.

I went away to the Air Force to defend my country and when I came back a hero you know—if you're comic book people—exactly what happened—*my stupid idiotic, damn fool parents had thoughtfully thrown it all away, INCLUDING THE BARREL!*

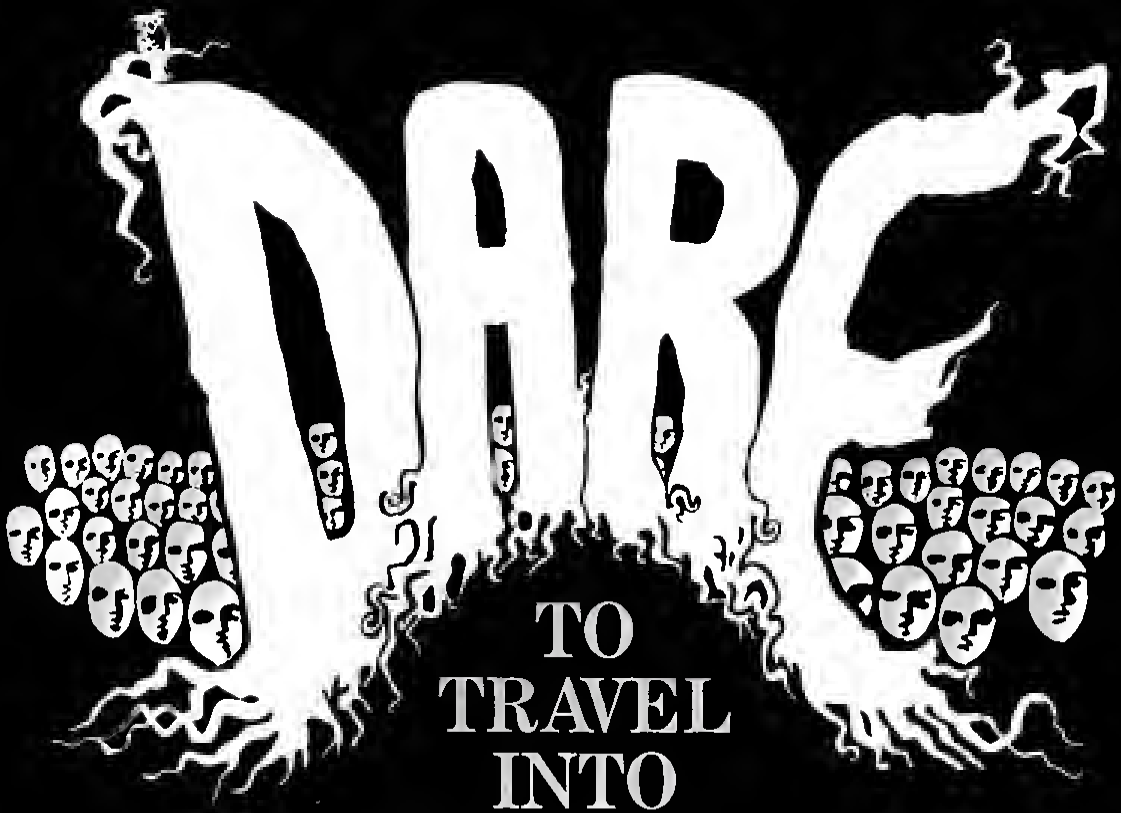
All right, so now you know for sure I love comic books. Know also that I am very fond of—love may be a mite too strong save for a few treasured standouts—comic book movies and I'm proud and happy to go and see them as part of my duties to this column, I am, in other words, favorably disposed to the form. I just want to establish I'm not cranky or mean, okay?

But enough already! (as we exclaim here in the concrete canyons of Manhattan) I have got four movies here to talk about, the whole lot that's come out lately in our special genre, and every one of the things is so much of a comic booker you can see the captioned balloons floating over the characters without even squinting your eyes. Sitting there in the darkness you find your hands trying to turn imaginary smudgy newsprint pages out of sheer reflex action. So please, Mister Hollywood, send us a couple of at least semi-grown-up movies before we all shrink back down into being these little kids, all right? Thank you so very much.

Pieced Officer

I'll start with the best of them which is ***Robocop.*** It's directed by Paul Verhoeven, his first American film and by God he lets you know it is *American.* It zips into action with the babblings of the sort of cute little man and woman news anchor team we have all regrettably come to know only too well, telling us smilingly about various horrible news items, with, of course, gory pictures, and from their blather we learn we are in the near future where everything that is bad now has become even worse including crime, pollution, inner cities, political and corporate corruption, and all-around tacky bad taste. This chatty duo keep cutting in at various points through the film in order to keep us up to date on the plot and to pass on little futuristic items, my personal favorite being their cheery announcement about the sudden destruction of a portion of California real estate and population due to an accidental misfire from a faulty "Star Wars" satellite.

The essential plot of the film concerns a socially collapsed, crime-ridden



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SCREEN

Detroit, and the corrupt, privately owned police force which, turning to robotics in its losing struggle with the city's entrenched gangsters, develops first a huge clumsy Enforcement Droid and, when that demonstrates a persistent ineptness, they turn the body of a slaughtered cop (played in perfect comic-book style by Peter Weller) into an armored cyborg and set the result to battling the law breakers of the town—which eventually brings him up against the same group of meanies that killed him in the first place.

This is further complicated—if complicated is not a contradiction in terms when you're thinking in comic book style—by the sinister doings of corporate biggies battling one another for power (including a cute pivotal scene taking place in the executive toilet). There are also some very nice side trips such as the cyborg's former police partner bringing him back through his robotic conditioning to a reestablishment of his original humanity (effectively shown by Robocop removing his slick helmet to reveal the stretched, tortured skin of his human face mounted on a metal frame), and a dandy slow and horrible death by pollution of one of the gangsters who is unfortunate enough to run his car into a storage tank filled with chemical wastes. The whole thing is crudely anti-American, hopelessly simplistic, and philosophically a sham, but Billy Batson would have liked it, and so did I, and maybe you too.

Punk Shock

The Lost Boys is a sort of EC horror comic book which, unlike *Robocop*, does not get off to a very snappy start for some odd reason. (The first "horrible scene," the killing of a security officer, is so badly fumbled that I had a sinking sensation about the rest of the movie) but it gets its feet after that and romps along in fine style, littering the landscape with horrible corpses and piling one grisly vampire effect on another, and the plot is full of cleverly crude twists signaled by ironic one liners (I almost said "captions"), and one is left with the comforting reassurance that the sunny coast of Southern California is just as riddled with vampiric activity as you always thought it was.

The plot concerns the slow revelation that the doings of a naughty bunch of biking young folk done up in Gypsy punk who bother the simple folk of a tourist trap on our looney Western coast are also a pack of practising vampires. It tells how they set out to corrupt an innocent youth via dark initiations which start in the ruined bowels of earthquake-shattered hotels and end with death-defying drops into the mist from high trestle bridges. And how they are found hanging by their toes in their daytime nests and eventually caused to die horrific vampire deaths by means of giant stakes and holy water baths and other highly satisfying means because innocent youth's little brother and a juvenile vampire swat team and dear old Pops team up to donate righteous help against the Californian powers of darkness. (And watch out for the middle-aged father figure, all you comic book readers, though to your ilk it hardly needs pointing out that such as he are the chief enemies and the main source of all our evils.) I still can't figure out the opener, but once she gets going, *The Lost Boys* is fine, innocent fun.



BOYS WILL BE BLOODSUCKERS: *Teen vampires in* The Lost Boys



PHOTO © 1987 WARNER BROS. INC.

ARMS AND THE SUPERMAN: *Reeves combats nuclear weaponry.*

Old Blue-Tights is Back

Moving right along, we come to ***Superman IV,*** one hundred per cent pure comic book territory if there ever was one, and for the first time, if you're in the mood for DC-type high morality (excuse my lapsing into comic book technical terms, but there's just no avoiding it) I feel I can give it a slightly guarded recommendation, which was not the case for any of the preceeding *Supermans* because in all the others there was a kind of pervasive hatred and loathing of The Man of Steel which I found repulsive in the extreme. Always, it was felt, the poor old Kryptonian had to be debased and humiliated (not just put up against some glorious, Wagnerian opposition, as is right and proper with such a hero, but debased by unworthy scum because of internal failings), or dragged down and mocked by the sneering crowd because

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SCREEN

of some personal weakness. Kind of weird, but that's the way they did it every time.

Anyhow, I am happy to report that rage against virtue is lacking in this film. The worst that happens to Superman in this movie is that he gets pummeled for a stretch by another super critter, this one powered by the sun itself (which is odd imagery for a dark force, but what the hell) and so, especially since he triumphs fairly in the end, it's only unvindictive fun.

I am not sure what's happened to all that dark hatred, maybe Alexander Salkind's absence has something to do with it, maybe not, but they've even let Margot Kidder play Lois Lane for minutes on end, so who knows what's been happening behind the scenes? Not I. And I think, somehow, I'm probably happier that way. Whatever, it isn't *super*, I won't go that far, but you may enjoy it, and for the first time you can take the kids to see Superman without wondering if they'll be puzzled by all that odd nastiness.

Pecs in Toyland

Masters of the Universe is actually based on a set of plastic toys, but the toys were firmly based on comic book traditions and the viewpoints and techniques employed in this movie most decidedly are, and I found the magazine page turning reflex was highly stimulated by the thing, as it is so truly and totally simple-minded you have to keep telling yourself over and over you're not actually looking at a comic book.

The basic ploy of the movie is quite cute and it is that the complications of the plot cause the Masters of the Universe superheroes and villians to come out of their usual weird environment on the planet where Castle Skull and Snake Mountain are located, which is probably a couple of billion trillion miles away, to a typical American everytown—comic book version, of course—and so you see snake men and space pilots battling it out with ray guns in front of Rexall Drug Stores, and Skeletor floating past the H&R Block Tax parlor as he glides along about five feet over Main Street America in his anti-gravity tulip throne, and I confess unashamedly that I very much enjoyed the surreal feeling of all those scenes.

The weakness in the movie is that—with the exception of Frank Langella, who has as much fun playing the evil *Masters of the Universe* fiend, Skeletor, as Burgess Meredith did a while ago playing the Penguin to television's *Batman*—the acting in this film is just so pure and plain godawful it puts you in mind of the ancient serials Republic used to crank out to these many years ago. I don't know the least thing about the private life or characteristics of the fellow that plays He-Man, the Masters of the Universe superhero, but I noticed in the credits he had both a special dramatic coach and a voice coach all to himself, and that's got to tell you something, though it wouldn't be fair to him if I didn't state firmly that all the other actors, with the aforementioned exception of Langella, could have also used at least one dramatic and voice coach apiece.

But, hey, what the hell, do you expect plastic toys to act good? Another small point, but it did keep drawing attention to itself. Langella's skull makeup was pretty cute but it had a really serious flaw in that the little hollow nose on it kept wiggling whenever he got down to serious ranting. I kept trying to pretend I hadn't noticed, but it was really distracting. Especially when he was talking about taking over the cosmos. You can't talk about taking over the cosmos and have your nose wiggle at the same time and expect people to take you seriously. ■



TOY-MAN: Lundgren flexes cartoonish muscles in Everytown USA.

PHOTO © 1987 CANNON FILMS, INC.

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ANOTHER DIMENSION: The Twilight Zone *returns to TV.*

The Twilight Zone is going back into production.

The recent version of the series wasn't very successful here in the United States. In fact, some believe the only reason **CBS** kept it on for even a partial second season was that they didn't want to cave in when **NBC** had ***Amazing Stories*** going for its second season. But the show has proven to be a hit overseas. **CBS Broadcast International** has been syndicating the episodes in England and other countries as half-hour (cut down from the hour-long episodes shown here), and wants more. An independent production company, **London Films**, has been tapped to produce new episodes.

Production will begin in May on thirty half-hours, which, when added to re-edited versions of the existing episodes, will provide a total of approximately ninety. Some of the network episodes will be expanded, using existing footage not used when originally broadcast. Others will be made up of two shorter segments. The new episodes will each contain a single story and the series' new producer, **Mark Shelmerdine**, said the tone will be much more like that of the original series. "I'm very conscious of Rod Serling's vision and one of the things I want to do is stamp his mark on these new shows." He went on to say that he felt the earlier CBS episodes had strayed from this vision. While CBS Broadcast International will be handling the distribution outside of North America, the Network/Syndication Ownership rules, as set up by the FCC, will not allow CBS to syndicate these shows themselves domestically. Domestically, the series will be syndicated by **MGM/UA Telecommunications**. The new made-for-syndication episodes will be shot in Canada on a much lower budget than their made-for-network brothers.

Gary Kurtz, the producer of *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, will start shooting a new film in January. ***Slipstream***, a science fiction tale set in the near future, tells of life after a natural cataclysm has turned the world into little more than a gigantic exaggeration of the Grand Canyon.

Much of civilization was lost in the global disaster, both in terms of lives and technology, and audiences will see a world surviving through a combination of 1980s technology and 1940s ingenuity. The new canyon geography causes high winds—thus the film's title—and transportation will be accomplished via ingenious airships.

The screenplay was written by **Charles Edward Pogue**, whose most recent credit was the remake of ***The Fly***. The film will shoot at **Pinewood Studios** outside of London for eight weeks, followed by three weeks of location work in Spain.

A mid-season replacement series from ABC will be ***Sable***, based on the comic book ***John Sable, Freelance***. **Lewis Van Bergen** will portray the mercenary adventurer. Van Bergen has previously had minor roles in several small feature films.

Also in the cast are **Renee Russo** (as Eden Kendall) and **Ken Page** (as Cheesecake). Page's credits include the role of Ol' Deuteronomy in the Broadway show *Cats*. **Gary Sherman** directs the pilot for **Taft Entertainment**.

Our favorite independent producers, **The Cabana Boys**, never cease to amaze. Once more **Ashley Tyler** and **Deborah Rosenberg** are back in the Hollywood

PHOTO © 1985 CBS

GRAPEVINE

trade press, talking about their proposed production of *Neuromancer* based on the novel by William Gibson. (Gibson, meanwhile, has recently finished work on the screenplay for *Aliens III*.)

Previously in the saga: After what they described as a long search for the perfect writer, including discussions with all the top talent in Hollywood, they settled on **Earl Mac Rauch**, the writer for *Buckaroo Banzai*. It was no secret that they'd had their heart set on making a sequel to *Buckaroo Banzai* but were settling for *Neuromancer*.

But soon, their perfect writer turned out to be not so perfect, and it was announced that they would be writing the screenplay themselves. After all, they said they had "found the golden thread" that runs through the novel and were using that to write a story that is "not so technical."

Now, still another entirely new and unexpected twist, even for The Cabana Boys. While a number of names have been bandied about as potential cast members, there has not been a single word breathed as to who will be directing. The news is finally out: Ashley Tyler.

Who? Well you might ask. Why Tyler is none other than the co-author of the *Neuromancer* screenplay. One of the original Cabana Boys. Someone with absolutely zero film credits of any kind, as far as I can tell. But Ashley Tyler has a vision. His partner, Deborah Rosenberg, says that his strength of vision is enough. And who would know better what makes a good director than the wife of a prominent plastic surgeon?

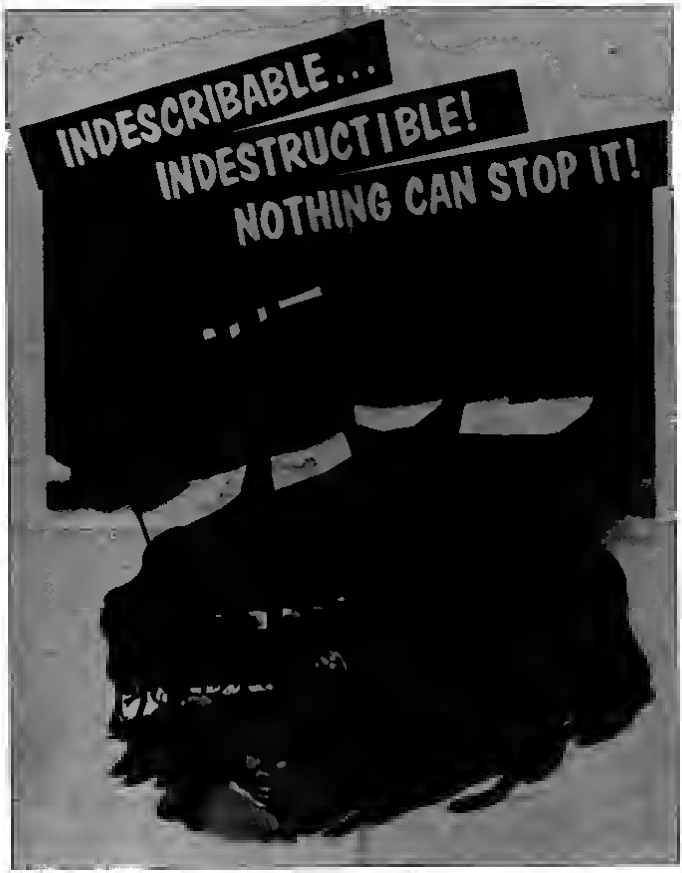
In 1958, **Steve McQueen** appeared in a low-budget science fiction epic, *The Blob*. The budget for that production was claimed to be two hundred fifty thousand dollars, although it was probably much lower.

Now, **Cinema Group Pictures** has announced it will commence production on a fifteen-*million*-dollar remake of that semi-classic in November, with an eye toward a Memorial Day 1988 opening. **Chuck Russell** will be directing this new version, with **Jack H. Harris** producing. Interestingly, Harris was the producer of the original 1958 film.

British independent production company **Coast to Coast Productions** is headed up by **George Dugdale** and **Peter Litten**. This pair's previous credits include the creation of ***Max Headroom***. Coast to Coast has just acquired the rights to produce up to three feature films based on ***Doctor Who***.

Litten and Dugdale will act as co-producers and co-directors on the features, with locations in England, Ireland, and the Canary Islands. They're hoping for a release in November of 1988, to coincide with the good Doctor's twenty-fifth anniversary.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Litten has said that fans of the series will be involved in making the casting decision for the role of Dr. Who.



SLIMED AGAIN: The Blob *oozes back to the big screen.*

In July, the interpolated ratings for syndicated programming were released. Below are the rankings of several sf/fantasy series in their current off-network runs. But first, some definitions. Rating equals the percentage of television sets tuned in to a given show, based on the total number of existing televisions. Share equals the percentage of television sets tuned in to a given show, based on the number of televisions *turned on at that moment*. Market equals a distinct socio-geographical area.

	Rating	Share	Markets
Star Trek	3.6	12	106
Buck Rogers	2.8	10	48
Twilight Zone	2.3	9	60
Incredible Hulk	2.1	10	24
Battlestar Galactica	2.1	9	24
One Step Beyond	1.7	6	8
Twilight Zone Hour	1.7	5	10
Lost in Space	1.5	6	14
Outer Limits	1.3	8	20
Voyage/Bottom/Sea	0.9	4	10

Just for comparision, *Wheel of Fortune* is in 212 markets with a rating of 13.6, *The Peoples Court* has a 7.2 rating in 194 markets, and *Throb* comes in with a 4.6 in 138 markets. ■

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*Globe Research Subscriber Survey, 1987

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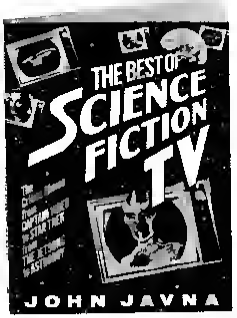
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COMING UP:



COMMUNING WITH THE UNKNOWN

"I don't think the universe is as it seems. I don't think time is what it seems. I don't think *we* are what we seem . . ." WHITLEY STRIEBER, author of *Communion and Cat Magic*, reveals the remarkable worldview behind his bestsellers in an exclusive new *Twilight Zone* interview. Strieber talks candidly about witchcraft, extraterrestrial contact, religion, and human psychology—and the mysterious links between them—in a surprising conversation with STANLEY WIATER.



THE TWILIGHT ZONE REVIEW

"There's an awful lot more going on in a movie theater than those funny little lights up there on the screen . . ." That's GAHAN WILSON on "Movie-Going in the Latter Eighties," just one part of our annual round-up of the best—and worst—of the fantastic arts. You'll find JAMES VERNIERE's verdict on the turkeys and triumphs of the year in film and EDWARD BRYANT on achievements in the world of books. Plus coverage of film, art, and the comics, in *The Twilight Zone Review*.



HAUNTINGS AND VISITATIONS

"*Help me. Please, help me!*" whispered the faint, desperate voice from the other side of the wall . . ." So begins a poignant new ghost story in the classic *Twilight Zone* tradition by British horror master GRAHAM MASTERTON, his first new piece of short fiction in several years. We also feature stories by two of the most imaginative young fantasists writing today: TIM POWERS and JAMES P. BLAYLOCK. Powers's "Night Moves" is a haunting novelette of a magical ghost-wind in Southern California, and Blaylock's "Two Views of a Cave Painting" is a delightful new tale of time travel featuring his Victorian professor, Langdon St. Ives. There's also new fiction from WARREN NORWOOD, and CEZARIJA ABARTIS, to name only two, as well as new discoveries in our ongoing TZ FIRST program. Plus our usual blend of the strange, the unexpected and the bizarre.

All in the April 1988 issue of

Rod Serling's THE TWILIGHT ZONE Magazine

On Sale January 26. **Where Dreams Become Real.**

THE OTHER SIDE

SNAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL



Better keep an eye out for John Hanks, the snake man.

He could turn up almost anywhere—and does. Hanks, of Pflugerville, TX, travels the country with his hand-crafted wares, all made of rattlesnake.

He makes top hats, cowboy hats, and derbies of diamondback-patterned snake skin (a hundred and fifty dollars each), and earrings of rattlesnake heads and tails.

"Some people buy a head for one ear and a tail for the other," he said. "A lot o' gals in Texas wear these."

They wear fanged snake earrings?

"They don't want men nibblin' on their ears," Hank said, chomping into a chaw of tobacco.

The idea for one of his best-selling items came slithering to him as a bad dream, he said: a forty-five dollar walking cane that is made of a lengthy rattler. The snake's wide-opened mouth is a decorative touch to the top of the cane.

"Carry this, and you'll find that you don't have to wait in line at the grocery store," Hanks said. "People get out of your way.

"Of course, I could make this same stuff out of any kind of non-deadly snake, but it wouldn't sell," he said. The selling point to a rattlesnake "is that it's easily identified—and it'll kill you."

Hanks said he grew up on a Texas homestead infested with rattlers. "I got caught in a two-hole outhouse with a rattlesnake when I was a kid," he said. ". . . haven't liked those suckers ever since."

Hanks served thirty-eight years in the merchant marine, sailing the world far from Texas rattlesnakes, and took up making belts and hatbands out of snakeskin as a hobby aboard ship.

It was a hobby that coiled and struck, and turned into a full-time job for him.

He buys the makings of his handiwork—live snakes, sometimes—at rattlesnake hunts around Texas. (Sure enough, in Texas, they make a sport of fooling with these mean-tempered snakes, some of which grow to five or six feet long.)

If the snakes are live, the snake man lops their heads off, being careful never to jab himself with the poisoned fangs of a severed head.

"I don't like 'em," Hanks said. "But I know what to do with 'em."

He skins the biggest snakes to be made into hats, and the smallest ones for keychain ornments.

Also, he deep-fries the meat, "like cathsh."

"I try to eat all the rattlesnake meat I can," Hanks said. "It's the best thing in the world for a person's memory.

"What was that I just said?"

John Hanks might strike anyplace that has an arts and crafts fair. Or, to find out what he has to sell, you could rattle his mailbox. P.O. Box 824, Pflugerville, TX, 78660.

—*Ron Wolfe*

THE OTHER SIDE

CEMETERY CHIC

Looking for someplace unusual to explore on your next vacation—a place to escape the bustle and crowds which swamp most tourist Meccas, somewhere to sit and quietly contemplate your intimations of mortality, to relax and philosphize, to satisfy a thirst for history, popular culture, art, witchcraft, or to simply seek inspiration for that elusive horror story you've been thinking about writing?

If you are in or near Macon, Georgia, you can take care of all of the above with a visit to the city's sprawling Rose Hill Cemetary. Well over a century old, the cemetery is spread over a series of rolling hills and ravines along a railroad track bordering the Ocmulgee River, which rolls contemplatively past the moodily drooping willows.



Art buffs will appreciate the many fine pieces of statuary which adorn the older graves, ranging from pseudo-Greek gods perched majestically above massive mausoleums near the river to a hauntingly expressive statute of a little girl which gazes out over nearby graves.

Rock music fans can visit the graves of Duane Allman and Berry Oakley of the Allman Brothers Band, killed nearly a year apart in virtually identical motorcycle accidents in practically the same location. Despite vigilant police patrols, fans often leave controlled substances as tribute on the graves.

History students will enjoy browsing through the cemetery's Confederate graveyard, where Civil War dead are buried in ranks of identical graves which march precipitately over a steep hillside beneath tranquil trees.

Although there has never been any solid proof that Satanist ceremonies are carried on in Rose Hill, rumors persist, and there have been incidents of desecrations and vandalism in recent years, including the spray-painting of pentagrams and other occult icons. A midnight visit on Walpurgisnacht or Halloween might prove eventful, indeed.

Until recently, an elderly Macon man conducted guided tours of the cemetery, called "Rose Hill Rambles," several times a year. He has now retired, but visitors are welcome to come and go as they please during daylight hours. Rose Hill is an endless source of material for photographers, with its twisting, turning pathways and ever-changing vistas providing countless opportunities for fine pictures.



Granted, most people don't naturally think of a cemetery as a place to spend an enjoyable afternoon. But a visit to Rose Hill should be enough to change even the most stubborn mind. The cemetery is located on Riverside Drive, with easy access to Interstate 16. So the next time things are looking dead in your city, liven things up with a trip to Macon, Georgia's city of the dead.

—*Tyson Blue*

THE OTHER SIDE

ORAL, HEALING

Imagine the gall: you're trying to give a good rousing sermon on a pleasant Sunday morning and one of the members of the audience decides to make a ruckus by having a fatal heart attack and dropping dead, smack in the idle of the aisle. Really. Some people will do anything for attention. What are you going to do? The mood of the moment is certainly broken.

If you're going to finish the sermon, all you can do is bring the poor schmoe back to life and try to finish up as best you can.

Sound bizarre?

It's only the latest claim of Oral Roberts, the minister who has become known for his flamboyant preaching style and even flashier behavior off the pulpit. Earlier this year the sixty-nine-year-old evangelist sequestered himself in a prayer tower on the campus of Oral Roberts University and claimed that God had spoken to him, and had demanded he raise eight million dollars by May first or else be summoned "back home."

That fund-raising stunt might seem, on the surface, impossible to equal, but does it get better. On *Richard Roberts Live*, a television program hosted by Oral's son, Oral stated that he had, on many occasions, brought the dead back to life.

"I can tell you about the dead people I've raised," he said on the program in June. "All of us in the ministry could talk about that—of certain dead ones raised, died right while I was preaching. I had to stop and go back in the crowd and raise the dead person so I could go ahead with the service."

But Roberts—who has received a good deal of attention for his claims and a fair amount of scrutiny in the wake of the religious scandals of the past few months, with his five-hundred-thousand dollar home in Tulsa, an eight-hundred-fifty-thousand-dollar private jet and a college and medical facilities—doesn't abuse his clout with the Allmighty. Nor does he suffer overmuch from the sin of pride. Roberts knows his limits.

"Let's be honest," he said on the same broadcast. "Not everyone we lay hands on gets well."

Nice to know, wouldn't you say?

—*Robert Simpson*

SPIDER FEAR

How are you on—spiders? D'ya like them? Or do you jump and yell "Jeez!" when one drops in your face? Or are you . . . terrified? Horror-stricken just thinking about billions of spiders out there, all of them hairy, writhing, disgusting, scuttling, spitting webs, mandibles clicking and biting . . .

It you're really, really, truly petrified of spiders—want a job? Some scientists are looking for a few good arachniphobes. And when they find you, they want to put you in a room. With



spiders. Then let the spiders creep closer . . . closer . . . closer. They're going to put spiders on your body, and watch them crawl all over you . . . those nasty little legs, those hideous twitching shapes . . . And this is not just therapy, mind you. On, no. These doctors don't simply want to cure your phobia.

They want your *fear*.

Wasn't that the plot of a few dozen old horror movies?

Maybe so. But now, researchers at Stanford University's Laboratory for the Study of Behavioral Medicine are investigating the correlation between human fear mechanisms and endorphin production. Endorphins—natural chemical compounds secreted in the brain in response to some types of stress—are already known to suppress pain. Doctors wonder whether endorphins also affect fear and anxiety—and whether persistent fears result from over- or under-production of these compounds. To find out, researchers will terrify people in laboratory settings, and monitor fluctuations in their endorphin levels. This is pure research, the quest for knowledge. No gains without pains.

Your pains.

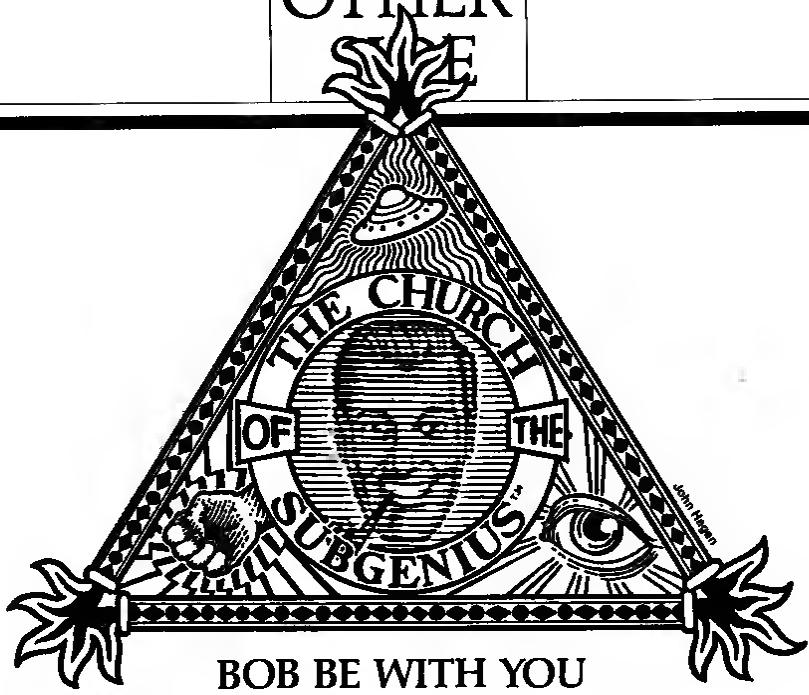
Their gains.

"It may be that some of the tasks we're proposing may be too extreme," Dr. Tom Merluzzi notes of his volunteers. "But we do want them to be afraid."

Science marches on.

—*Mark Arnold*

THE OTHER



BOB BE WITH YOU

Take a moment for this quick test and answer "yes" or "no" to the following questions:

Are we controlled by secret forces?

Are Alien Space Monsters bringing about a startling new world?

Are you looking for an inherently bogus religion that will condone mega-degeneracy and yet tell you that you are superior to everyone else?

If you've answered "yes" to at least two of the above questions, then *The Book of the SubGenius* should be on your reading list. First published in 1983, the bible of this Dallas-based cult of cults is in paperback again ($9.95, Fireside Books) and up-dated to meet the spiritual needs of the 1990s.

Believe it or not, according to SubGenius teachings, the world will come to an end at 7:00 a.m. July 5, 1998 when aliens from the Planet X invade our planet and turn us all into either charcoal briquets or love slaves. The only people spared will be the card-carrying, dues-paying SubGeni, and over three thousand people have paid a twenty dollar fee to insure a place in the next world.

If you're confused, don't worry. Confusion is about the only "normal" thing characterizing the SubGenius Church. *The Book of the SubGenius* describes the founding of the church by one J.R. "Bob" Dobbs, a sleazy salesman and Hollywood exploitation film producer who discovered the 1998 invasion plans and struck a deal with one of the space gods, Jehovah One. If the people of earth listened to "Bob" and followed the path of slack, then they might be saved. Slack, according to the Rev. Ivan Stang, the book's editor, should be the goal of all human endeavors. Although we're all born with original slack, many people lose their slack thanks to the machinations of the Conspiracy.

The Conspiracy are the "sheep-like normalcy dupes" who want to think the SubGenius Church is a joke. In fact, the only sin of the church is to admit the whole thing *is* a joke.

This theology that proclaims that "you can pull the wool over your own eyes" was founded nearly ten years ago by Stang and other iconoclasts in Texas. They combined the blood and thunder Christian broadcasting they heard with the writings of assasination conspiracy buffs, UFO devotees, Big Foot enthusiasts and other fringoids to produce a powerfully weird hybrid. Besides finishing this new book, the church has radio shows on independent Dallas and Berkley stations, publishes an annual magazine, and conducts "devivals" in major cities across the country.

Stang is quick to point out the church is not a haven for the folks who talk to themselves in airport. "Bob's" smiling face with his ever-present pipe can be seen on Pee Wee Herman's bulletin board every Saturday morning on CBS. Famed underground cartoonist R. Crumb is an ardent church member who said, "Finally, a religion even *I* can believe in."

To make matters worse for the members of the Conspiracy, Stang and his fellow ministers are preparing a feature-length home video featuring church teachings, highlights of de-vivals and religious ceremonies too intense to describe to non-SubGeni. The next project, hints Stang, is a national syndication deal for the SubGenius Hour of Slack radio show.

To find out more about church, write to the sacred P.O. Box 140306, Dallas, Texas 75214. Just mentioning the post office box fills one with slack, said Stang. Praise "Bob!"

—G. *Michael Dobbs*

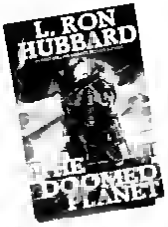
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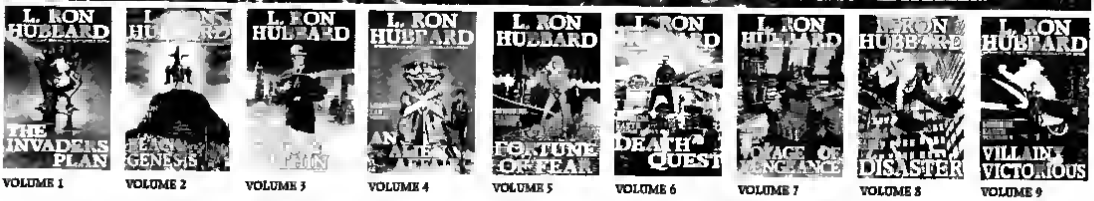
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